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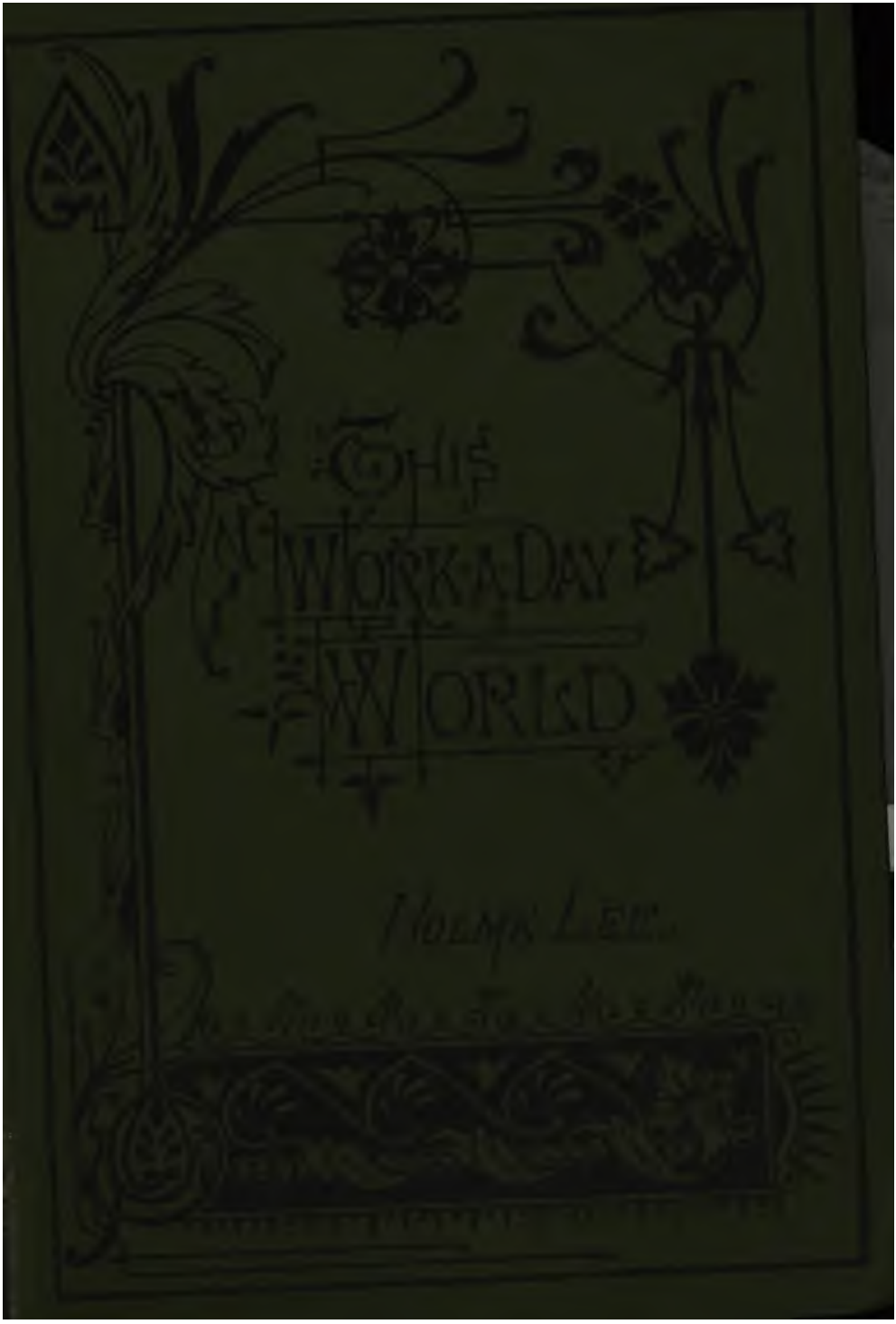
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THIS
WORK-A-DAY
WORLD
HOLMES LEE


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THIS WORK-A-DAY WORLD.

VOL. I.

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THIS WORK-A-DAY WORLD.

BY

HOLME LEE,

AUTHOR OF

"SYLVAN HOLT'S DAUGHTER," "BEAUTIFUL MISS BARRINGTON,"
"VICISSITUDES OF BESSIE FAIRFAX."

VOL. I.



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THIS WORK-A-DAY WORLD.

CHAPTER I.

THE WIDOW HESKETH.

FIFTY years ago Castle Green at Cotham was still an irregular open space, bounded on three sides by fine, timbered houses, and on the other by the river Foss. The Castle had ceased to exist save in tradition, and in a bit of crumbling wall here and there, known only to local antiquaries; but the royal quarter maintained its dignity, and the old houses continued to be the chosen habitation of those professional persons whose avocations tied them to the town, though already the taste for retirement to suburban fields was beginning to infect the richer sort.

There were no shops on the Green at this

date, nor until several years later, and the first that was opened was the occasion of much heart-burning in the select community. It was as little obtrusive as shop could be, but the offence of it was not easily condoned. HESKETH was the name upon the door, and a legend, exposed to public view in the window of the original front parlour, gave all whom it concerned to understand that Anna Hesketh was a shoemaker's draper, and dealt in leathers, foreign and domestic, prunellas, lastings, galoons and trimmings.

Mrs Anna Hesketh was a widow, the youngest of six sisters, born in the lower-middle rank of life, and all married in the third decade of the century. As she was the youngest so she was the last to settle (she was nine-and-twenty when she married, and had prospered for some years as the chief milliner at Hulton) and in point of money and social standing, she was considered to have done better than any of her sisters. But time, who tries all things, proved that in reality she had done the worst. For while the bread-winners of the others were

rising by prudent thrift and counsel, Anna's gay and graceful partner was declining by qualities quite the opposite of theirs.

George Hesketh was the elder son of a merchant in the city of London, a young gentleman of popular manners, who sang a good song, told a good story, dressed well, looked well, and was always ready to lend his name to an embarrassed friend. The young couple set up house at Cotham on their marriage: that ancient town being a convenient central point in the northern circuit which Hesketh & Co. travelled for orders. The Firm had a name for a long established and extensive wholesale trade in such goods as were then in general use amongst cordwainers, but the fluctuations of fashion, and other circumstances as well, were already impairing its prosperity.

Anna had no inkling of this for a long while. George Hesketh did not invite his wife to take any interest in the business. All he required from her was that she should keep him a pleasant home, and give his boon-companions a pleasant welcome when he

brought them to his fireside. Two children, a boy and a girl, were born to them in the house on Castle Green, where they lived with the same appearance of substantial comfort as the world around them. The first warning Anna received of anything going wrong was the sight of two bailiffs in the house, taking an inventory of the furniture. She had been out for a walk by the river with the two children and the nurse, and this was the spectacle that met her when she came home. She used to tell her little girl in after years that it was on this occasion she fainted for the only time in her life. But she rallied from the shock like a woman of spirit, and set herself to rescue the best salvage she could out of the wreck. She astonished her neighbours by the vigour and promptitude with which she acted. They had known her hitherto merely as a pretty, elegantly dressed little woman, who held her head rather high, and condescended to few intimacies. George Hesketh's importunate creditors received each a visit from her, the bailiffs were withdrawn, and

a longer day was granted in consideration of his wife's pledge that they should be paid, if they would give him time.

The years that followed this incident were far less happy for the young couple than those that had gone before. Anna's pride and affection had been stung to the quick by her husband's closeness. She never brought herself thoroughly to forgive him. She took upon her to question and investigate; she made further mortifying discoveries, and insisted on signal retrenchments. She found her modest dower of a thousand pounds (her own earning and saving) which she had supposed to be laid up against a rainy day, gone by driblets, and nothing to show for it; she found the fruits of waste in accumulated debts, and the fruits of negligence in lost custom and credit. Once she had begun to search into his affairs, George let her go on; let her serve him as clerk and overseer, while he spent his evenings at the tavern and the play, was still late o' nights and drowsy in the mornings, still devoted to his pleasures and careless of his duties.

Never a woman of many words, his wife became now silent to austerity. She took a lodger into the upstairs sitting-room, whose rent paid the house-rent; she discarded the nurse, curtailed the cost of her own and her children's dress, limited the luxuries of her table, and frowned away the locusts who would have continued to prey on their diminished substance. Thus home was made dull and unattractive. The master of the house felt himself thrust into a corner of it, and complained that on his return from his journeys Anna was more eager to inspect his order-book than glad to see him, and minister to his comfort. Perhaps he was not without reason in his complaints: money-anxiety is a nail that corrodes comfort fast. Anna, on her side, used to plead that if once they were released from the pressure of debt she could be herself again, and easy. But this pressure was not to be taken off, nor ease restored while George lived.

About two years after the first act in their tragedy Hesketh and Co. were in the

Gazette. Mr Hesketh the elder came down to Cotham while their affairs were in process of liquidation, and paid his son and his daughter-in-law a long visit. He was a most agreeable old gentleman, quite the gentleman, and perhaps it was a mercy that he and his old lady-wife were taken from a world of trouble without any prolonged shivering in the bitter winds of adversity. Their son George was soon to follow them. One night he came in from a late carouse after the play highly exhilarated. The next morning he set out in the rain with a party of friends for Norminster races. When he re-appeared at the week's end, he had a heavy cold upon him, and his temper was so morose that the poor children were scared into silence, and kept out of his sight. His wife knew without telling that he had lost at Norminster what he could not pay. But some subtle fear and prevision held her in check, and she gave her grieved and angry thoughts no tongue. It seemed that her patience touched him, and re-awakened his better mind. On the last

Sunday morning of his life he went to church with her again, and in the evening he heard the children read a chapter in the Bible, and repeat a hymn before they went to bed.

Afterwards, being alone with his wife, he said to her: 'I have been nothing but a care to you, Anna.' She looked at him wistfully, and did not deny it. 'I hope the little ones will make you amends.'

'Don't talk in that way, George—you will turn over a new leaf,' replied she.

'It is too late. I have thrown away my chances. My poor brother Tom has done no good either; but their Aunt Agnes will be a friend to the children. Don't let them sink—she will help you to give them a genteel education.'

Genteel! That word was odious to Anna. It stood for a thousand pretences, affectations, vulgarities that her simple, honest soul could not away with.

'I will give them a useful education, and bring them up to help themselves—both the boy and the girl,' said she coldly.

'I know you will do your duty by them better than I have done mine by any of you,' said George. And then he was quiet.

Anna had forgotten her wiles of tenderness, but her heart ached and reproached her nevertheless. She wanted to speak kindly to him again, but somehow her lips could not frame the gentle words once familiar enough. He had not been a good husband to her—but had she made the best of him?

The following day rubicund Dr Franks was sent for to prescribe for George Hesketh. The doctor was more of a jolly companion than of a physician, and in discoursing loudly of events on the turf, he lost sight of his friend's fever and inflammation. Anna had to recall him to his professional duty, and then, for five minutes the doctor was serious. Each of his subsequent visits was like the first: half an hour for sporting gossip, and five minutes for his patient's case. George died. Perhaps he would have died just the same had the grave and reverend Dr Archer attended him; but Anna did not think so, and

Dr Franks was not invited to attend the funeral. The widow buried her husband in the churchyard of St Stephen Martyr, at the corner of Castle Green, only she and her two children—children of seven and five years old—walking behind the coffin to the grave, with her former nurse and the undertaker's man. She would engage in no avoidable expense; for when George died, she did not know whether she had a shilling that she could rightly call her own. He even lay in the grave more than a year before any stone marked it.

Much of the happy-go-lucky sort of advice, which kind-hearted busy-bodies are ever ready to offer, fell to Mrs Hesketh's lot before her mind was made up as to what it would be feasible and judicious to do for the future maintenance of herself and her children. She never looked down in the world for a moment, though she might well have sunk under the discouraging doubts, fears, possibilities and uncertainties which the same idly active imaginations were eager to suggest. She had more

wit than seriously to heed either her would-be directors or her alarmists. She was aware of her own capabilities, and willing to exert them. Industry and thrift were born in her, and she had no false pride to be a hindrance to any effort that might seem a duty. She took a calm survey of her position. Mr Andrews, the lodger in possession of her upstairs parlour and spare bed-room, was contented to stay there, and in the large attic at the top of the old house were left goods enough to stock a shop for a year, even if all the remaining customers of her late husband continued their orders to her. She got a pledge of support from the majority, and the London Firm which had risen on the ruins of Hesketh & Co., declared themselves willing to establish business relations with the enterprising widow. Finally, she was in the midst of people who had known her in better days, and had known nothing to her disadvantage—a weighty reason with a woman for staying where she was. Fair-weather acquaintances she could no longer associate with on equal terms, but she had one

or two friends whom she could trust for friendliness in all fortunes. And thus it came to pass that on a certain Saturday in June, about two months after George Hesketh's death, his wife's name appeared in the advertisement sheet of the *Cotham Herald*, soliciting the continued support of his former patrons, and on the Monday following—Midsummer day of all the good days in the year—the shop on Castle Green was opened.

The widow Hesketh belonged to that now extinct order of widows indeed who cut off their long hair, and covered their heads with muslin caps, ruffled and crimped in triple tiers round the face. A very serious, self-possessed face was hers thus invested. She was not forty, and she was still handsome, but a jest with the widow Hesketh was impossible. The calm, grave regard of her sensible brown eyes quelled the rising thought of familiarity, and tied the most idle and presumptuous tongues. A very little while sufficed to convince all men that the widow Hesketh was a woman to be respected, and let alone; a woman who had

made up her mind about men, and was as well able to fend and care for herself as ever a man in Cotham. She proved shrewd, accurate, methodical and punctual in business, and a modest, equal sort of prosperity was the result. Her regular, pious behaviour, and possibly her indifference to criticism, disarmed adverse opinion, and settled her soon in excellent credit with her neighbours. In a couple of years she had got her white-coifed head well above water; in two or three more she was able to look about her and consider her ways and means for her children's provision in the future. That was her object in life—the bringing up and putting out in the world of her children—of George's children whom he had charged her not to let sink. She had no ambition for them, and no great expectations, but she had a duty to fulfil, and for the issue she must trust God.

That was how she stated the matter to her kinsfolk and her own conscience, and perhaps she could not have stated it more simply or more wisely.

CHAPTER II.

THE WIDOW HESKETH'S CHILDREN.

It was a brilliant December morning after a week of keen frost. There had been a fresh fall of snow in the night which the householders, in obedience to police regulations, had swept off the flags into the road. Ashes, sawdust, sand or salt had been strewn in front of each inhabited dwelling, for the prevention of slides on the adhesive icy particles, but on Bankside, next the river, the boys had it all their own way, and long lines of them, with book-bags hung round their necks, went down the shining black perils with arms extended to maintain their balance. It was on the way to school, to the Free Grammar School, that is, where every native-born boy of Cotham was entitled to a liberal education; and there was Dick Hesketh with a score or two more, getting

himself into a glow before going in at nine o'clock for his little Latin and less Greek.

His sister Winny stood shivering and looking on, and stamping her little club-boots that were covered with coarse worsted socks, to avert the dangers of slipperiness. Winny could slide, and liked sliding, but Dick would not let her slide with the town-boys. Dick was rather strict in his notions of propriety for girls—of course, such notions were derived from his mother, who instructed him that it was necessary to take care of his sister out-of-doors; and as the school Winny went to was at the corner of Church Street, on the road to the Grammar School, they walked there and back under the same umbrella when it rained, and in all weathers they quitted the house together under the widow's eye.

The first stroke of nine by the town clock was the signal for a general scamper. Winny ran too, valiantly plunging through the heaps of soft snow above her boots, and cheerfully receiving now and again a handful snatched up in haste, and dashed at random against the

fairest mark. When she rushed into Mrs Mason's porch her aspect was that of the female Esquimaux represented in her geography-book, escaping from a storm. 'Shake yourself before you come in, Miss Hesketh,' cried a voice, and Winny ran out and shook herself—shook the beaver bonnet on her head, her fur tippet loaded with crisp white dust, her red merino frock fringed with the same, and jumped half-a-dozen times vehemently up and down to unload her queer little elephantine feet. 'There, there, that will do—come in;' said the same voice; and Winny went in, and the door was shut.

After school Dick overtook his sister with a 'Halloo, Winny! stop!—Do you know that the Foss Islands are frozen over? I shall ask mother if I may have holiday this afternoon, and go,' he announced triumphantly.

'O Dick, ask mother if I may go with you—please do,' cried Winny in almost ecstatic supplication.

'No. Besides she would not let you if I did. Don't bother, and on Saturday you shall go with me to the Ings, if the Foss Islands won't bear.'

'The Ings won't bear if the Foss Islands won't,' pleaded Winny.

'You know nothing about it—then you can slide all down the flags under the Asylum wall'—

Winny knew that words were vain when Dick had made up his mind. She went to school again after dinner, and Dick got his mother's leave to go to the Foss Islands on the plea that before next half-holiday the frost would very likely break-up. He had noble sport, and came home as hot as a toast just before tea-time. The warm place at the round table nearest the fire was Dick's by right—or by use and custom—and Winny sat opposite, between the table and the wall, and their mother in the chimney-corner. After tea out came the children's lesson-books, and Dick's slate with a long something to write. Mrs Hesketh was busy first with the shop-books; then she took her knitting—blue yarn socks for Dick—and knitted in a silence that might be felt. Winny covered her ears, rested her elbows on the table, and applied eyes and mind to learning her

lessons for the next day. Presently Dick tried to attract her attention—by grimaces, by a fictitious cough, and finally by kicking her under the table. Then Winny looked up, and Dick formed with his lips a soundless question: 'Where is "Barnaby Rudge"?' Winny incautiously answered out loud: 'I spoke first for it, Dick.' Dick frowned and shook his head, and glanced at his mother who came out of her reverie, and gazed mildly round. Winny was red and guilty in the face; Dick seemed above suspicion of underhand dealing.

'When you know your lessons, Winny, get to your sewing until eight o'clock,' said Mrs Hesketh in a tone not to be denied.

Winny stared hard at the page of French phrases she had to learn by heart for ten minutes longer, and Dick grinned a half-ashamed little grin of satisfaction. Then he clapped up his books, and extended a grubby red and brown fist for that delightful volume—poor Winny had been sitting upon it for security since before tea; and she had now to rise, and pass it over to Dick, so inexpressibly blest in being a boy,

and consequently exempt from horrid sewing.

It was wristbands, shirt-wristbands for that same Dick, Winny was at work upon, and she bored away with conscientious diligence, though eight o'clock would come none the sooner for her industry. The pair she had in hand were finished some minutes before the hour, and with a flickering hope and expectation that she might now be permitted to give over, she said: 'Mother, I have done these.' But that Spartan widow only rejoined: 'Then get another pair.' Winny did as she was bid, and would not have felt mortified had not Dick wagged his head at her, rejoicing in his own pleasure, so much the further prolonged.

Eight o'clock struck when it was due, and Winny on the instant disposed of her sewing, and appealed for the book.

'Let me finish this chapter,' said Dick with an air of remonstrance.

'Is it very long?' asked Winny.

'No—none of the chapters are very long,'

said Dick, and sunk his head in the fascinating page.

Winny went round to the further side of the fire, to the old wicker rocking-chair, rocked herself slowly and watched the fire. Once Dick peeped behind him, and saw from her eyes that she was making pictures in the red embers. He was a long while finishing that chapter. But suddenly Winny came to herself, jumped up, and looked over his shoulder: 'Oh, Dick, you have begun another!' cried she.

'Who told you to look over my shoulder? There—take it!' said Dick, and Winny got the book, at last.

Winny's enjoyment was not marred by its delay or by Dick's discontent. She did not yield to any impulse of sacrifice, and offer to give it up to her brother. She just looked at him, and took her right; and Dick, thrown on his own limited resources, went to see by the kitchen-clock how long it wanted to his sister's bed-time. Susan was already setting out upon the tray the apple-pasties and cups of milk for the children's supper. At a quarter to nine

she carried it into the parlour, and Winny, in the midst of the most exciting scenes in the story, had to shut up the book, to take her refreshment, and then to take her candle, and go to bed. Dick sat up with his mother, and read 'Barnaby Rudge' to the very last minute —nay, he surreptitiously conveyed it upstairs, and read on until his candle went out, and left him in darkness.

Who shall say that Winny Hesketh had not good reason to regret that she was not born a boy? She did regret it every day that went over her head. Opportunities of comparison never failed her, and to her green experience it seemed immeasurably better to be Dick than Winny. She had no limitations of work to repine at, but she ardently coveted the privileges of boys at play. After school Dick might idle at his pleasure out of doors, but Winny must come in, and sit at her seam in the dull parlour behind the shop. Dick was not afraid of a mouse; he could play cricket, trap-and-ball, and hare and hounds on half-holidays; Dick owned a humming-top, a double-bladed knife, a kite of pro-

digious soaring power, and a fluctuating treasure in marbles; while Winny owned nothing but a small rosewood work-box, neatly lined with blue, a ball for ball-play, worn in her pocket, and annually renewed at Whitsuntide Fair, a black lead pencil, and an old doll that she had never profoundly loved. She had lately taken to drawing caricatures of Miss Theresa, and a very pernicious trait it was reckoned, that she made fun of her doll. Winny was not commonly accounted a good little girl. She was continually wanting to do something she ought not, and being as continually thwarted, repressed, and admonished, she not seldom turned restive, perverse, and defiant. What child has a chance against her elders in such naughty tempers? what chance ought she to have? Discipline must be maintained, and little naughty girls have to bear the yoke, let them fret and chafe ever so. And, no doubt, it is good that they should bear it.

Mrs Hesketh did not know that she was partial, but Dick got many a reprieve and indulgence that Winny pleaded for in vain.

How could it be otherwise? What was fit liberty for a boy would have been letting a girl run wild—which was not to be thought of on Castle Green. Winny might indulge in marbles when she was at a loss for a pastime, but then she had commonly to make her game alone on the faded pattern of the parlour carpet; for Dick condescended to her company only on wet days or when he had none other. And she preferred ball when she had the room to herself to be noisy in.

The widow's son was a dark-skinned, dark-eyed lad, with small features, and a small head adorned with wavy soft hair. Winny was dark-eyed too, but fairer in the face. Both the children had fine health, and while they were young they gave their mother no anxiety. She enjoyed a few tranquil, reposeful years after her husband's death. Her business, once set well agoing, marched forward with equal success, and she could even anticipate a period when, her children's education and putting out in the world being provided for, she might lay up a fund against the decline of her own days. She

had no succour either moral or material from her kindred. They looked down on the obscure endeavours of the widow with a distant, silent approval, volunteering no advice, lest they should incur, perhaps, an appeal for help. Three only of Mrs Hesketh's sisters were now living: Jane, the wife of Mr Joseph Stansfield, a wealthy clothier at Leeds; Elizabeth, the wife of Mr Thomas Clarkson, a West India broker, resident at Bristol; and Hester, the wife of Mr Robert Rutherford, a Russia merchant established at Hull. They kept up an intermittent correspondence by letter with 'Poor Anna,' and would all have met her as affectionate sisters had the course of circumstances brought them together; but circumstances seem to have a way of combining for the purpose of keeping such relations apart, and their aunts and cousins on their mother's side were no more yet than names to the young Hesketh.

The person from whom they derived their notions of real kindred was their Aunt Agnes in London. Aunt Agnes had announced to

the widow that she would never forget her brother George's children; and as long as they were children a parcel from town, containing something useful towards their clothing, and something pretty to please them, never failed to make its appearance at the house on Castle Green soon after New Year's Day. Mrs Hesketh as regularly forestalled its arrival by the despatch of a Christmas hamper of poultry and game, with Ribston pippins and Cotham cakes to stuff the corners; for Aunt Agnes also had children to be gratified in their sweet tooth. The widow sent her hamper as a set-off against the parcel. A leaven of pride raised her independence of spirit. The sisters-in-law had never been cordial friends. Aunt Agnes had made no secret of her opinion that her brother had married beneath him, and the widow resented her contempt with equal scorn; but for the children's sake, and because their father had desired it, the courtesies of kindred were strictly observed. Aunt Agnes was married to Mr Moses Hayland, a former clerk of Hesketh and Co.—a pious good man who made it a duty

to assist his poor relations—and such men always have many. But for the systematic charitableness of his principles it is not certain that his wife's kindness of heart would have kept warm so long; the widow Hesketh, however, gave her sister-in-law the full credit of her liberality, and the children were brought up to regard their aunt in London as the richest and best friend of all who belonged to them. And such, substantially, she was.

CHAPTER III.

THE WIDOW HESKETH'S NOTIONS.

DICK and Winny had much debated, much speculated what the next New Year's parcel would bring them from Aunt Agnes. It did not arrive until the tenth of January. After dark it arrived, after the shop was shut, and when the door-bell rang the children cried out simultaneously: 'The parcel from Aunt Agnes, mother!'

Mrs Hesketh looked up from her knitting, and Susan entered wearing a broad grin of sympathy, the big brown paper parcel supported in her two arms, and dangling in one hand the carrier's way-bill to sign. Mrs Hesketh signed the sheet, and the parcel being deposited on the table, she proceeded to unloose the many-knotted, thick string—which Dick, like a careful good boy, wound

into a hank to serve again—and to unfold the numerous layers of paper that enveloped it. First came out a handsome desk of mahogany with brass lock, corners and name-plate. 'That's for Dick,' said Winny—and for Dick it was. Then a gay volume in embossed leather binding, with gilt edges and a frontis-piece representing a young lady in distress bidding farewell to her pet pony—this was for Winny—'Decision—A Moral Tale,' by Mrs Hofland. Then a sable muff of the diminutive size beginning to supersede the large comforts of the elder generation—the widow smiled as she turned it round on one hand, and said that it was more suitable for Aunt Agnes than for herself. The next revelation was a piece of silk, of a pretty lead colour, very soft, and figured all over in a minute leaf-pattern. At sight of this the widow coloured and looked quite vexed—it was a dress for Winny. 'Very unfit for her,' said her mother; but Winny's eyes shone with admiration. And that was all.

Dick, assuming the proud air of property,

devoted himself for the remainder of the evening to the investigation, the arrangement and re-arrangement of the contents of his grand new desk—there was paper in it of all sizes, a seal, sealing-wax, and a secret-drawer. Dick was superlatively happy. Not so poor Winny. She had understood from her mother's face as she refolded the beautiful piece of silk, that it was not to be for her adornment. The thing had occurred before. Aunt Agnes had sent for her last Christmas an elegant Swiss muslin, tucked and embroidered, and a draper who respected Mrs Hesketh had kindly taken it off her hands in exchange for a neat sprigged woollen fabric that would wear for summer Sundays one year, and then wash and wear again at school. Winny foresaw that the act of barter was to be repeated, and though she was pleased with her new book, she found it impossible to disengage her mind entirely from the fleeting vision of her silk attire. She retreated to the rocking-chair, and bent her head over the moral page, but neither from Dick nor from her mother was the state of her feel-

ings hidden. A hand went up to her cheeks so often that Dick knew she was winking and wiping away furtive tears, and being in a first-rate humour over his own acquisition he dropt 'The Pasha of many Tales' into her lap, whispering that he should not want it any more to-night. Winny sighed, but her eyes cleared; she laid down her new book, and took up the old volume from the circulating library, and would probably have found in it successful diversion for her pathetic thoughts had not her mother reflected that the occasion ought to be improved. She was an excellent mother, and exacted perfect obedience from Winny, but she was never above rendering her a reason for it, when Winny came to the age of reason. Her voice was grave, her manner was cold, but she loved her children with a most complete devotion.

'It is very silly to cry, Winny,' she said remonstrating. 'Your Aunt Agnes does not consider that what it may be proper for your Cousin Lucy and your Cousin Ellen to wear must be altogether out of character for you.

That silk is worth six shillings a yard at least—Mrs Mason herself could not wish for a better. I should not like to see you walking to church in it.'

'Not to buy it, mother, but when Aunt Agnes gives it?' said Winny with a quiver in her voice.

'That would make no difference in appearance—you would be dressed above your station. And even if silk were not beyond my means, that silk would be very unbecoming for a little girl of twelve years old—it is too rich and sober. I might wear it myself, so far as age goes.'

'Then do wear it, mother, I don't care,' said Winny resignedly. 'Only don't let Mr Radstock have it'——

'Mr Radstock would give me its full value in more useful things. I shall never wear colours again, Winny. But if you would like to have it laid by until you are older, it shall go into the great yellow chest.'

This proposal chimed in with Winny's sentiments. 'Then come upstairs with me, and

we will put it away at once,' said the widow, and Winny rose with alacrity. She always enjoyed an excursion into the great yellow chest. It was full of her mother's maiden-history, and of tales of her better days, all told in clothes that had been put off while still unworn, and laid by with the thrifty reflection that they might come in some day for Winny, if she lived.

The moment the lid was lifted a smell of dry fustiness and lavender assailed the senses—the contents did not often taste the air. The chest had two divisions. Into one of them—amongst ancient needle-work and materials therefor—Winny was permitted to dive herself, but the other division was sacred. In its depths reposed her mother's best wedding-dresses—even the very dress she was married in—and her babies' fine linen and worked frocks. Winny put up a petition that these interesting relics might be shown to her now. The widow Hesketh was never reluctant to indulge such memories as they evoked, and one thin parcel after another was taken up, opened, and

talked over in a slow, musing tone. Now and then Winny looked in her mother's face, and asked a pertinent question. Ideas begin to germinate in shrewd brains of twelve, and Winny was observant and critical enough to see that she had been much more daintily clothed when she was a little baby than ever she was now.

'Were you once as well off as Aunt Agnes, mother?' was her leading query to-night.

'Yes. I did not know what debt and difficulty were before I was married. There was not much comfort after—your father was embarrassed for money when we came to Cotham, and though we kept up appearances for a few years, it was a struggle. You remember your father, Winny?'

'I remember taking the pips out of the apple-cores when you were making pies—he liked the pips, and always gave me sixpence. And I remember when he brought the Noah's Ark from Rotterdam for Dick and me.'

'Your father always brought home expensive presents, and very useless often. Here is one—a

piece of satin from Edinburgh, the Stuart tartan, so stout it would stand of itself. It was thoughtless of him, because we were in mourning at the time for your grandfather and grandmother Hesketh, who died within a month of each other.'

'Did I ever see either of them, mother?'

'Old Mr Hesketh was at Cotham twice—a most gentlemanly old man, in knee-breeches and black gaiters—but you are not likely to recollect him. Your grandmother I never saw after I was married. I went to London once before to make their acquaintance, and stayed at the house of business in Bread Street, and at their country-house at Stoke Newington. It was when peaches and nectarines are ripe,—and your Aunt Agnes came from school to see me.'

'Was she nice, mother? She must have been nice, I think.'

'Agnes was a pretty girl, and very fond of her brother George. She was accomplished, and played well on the piano, and there were flower-pieces of her painting hung up in the bedrooms.'

'I wish she would come and see us at Cotham,

mother,' said Winny, and she said it very wishfully.

The widow Hesketh paused in the act of unfolding a dress of dove-coloured poplin that had a multiplicity of rows of satin ribbon for trimming round the scanty skirt. Her thoughts paused, too, upon that suggestion dropt by her little girl. She was lost in reflection for several minutes, and Winny perceived that she had arrested her mother's attention; nevertheless when she spoke again it was only to say: 'This dress must be turned to account for you next summer, Winny, or there will not be enough of the material to make you one—skirts are worn wider every year. When you have finished stitching Dick's collars and wristbands you might as well begin to pick it in pieces to be ready.'

'I like it better than the silk Aunt Agnes has sent — I like the colour,' said Winny much gratified. 'And that is your wedding-dress and pelisse, mother?' as another parcel, most carefully enveloped, was lifted out of the deep chest.

'Yes, Winny.' There was something very delicate and attractive in the silvery silk folds that Mrs Hesketh only half opened. A dress of those days went into small compass. Winny did not ask for more than a peep. She knew the straight skirt of the pelisse, lined with white silk, and the under skirt, garnished with three narrow flounces of filmy mechlin lace, the short waist and tight sleeves, the exact pipings and leaf trimming that must have been such a labour of time to make. There was another parcel within the outer cover of the widow's wedding-dress, containing three cashmere waistcoats, a faded white one, and a buff and canary, which had kept their colour; between them there were a pair of gloves, and a russia-leather pocket-book that scented the whole collection. Winny and her mother contemplated these things in silence. When they were put out of sight again, and the chest was being restored to darkness and the moth, the widow Hesketh opened her mouth, and spoke with calm, deliberate conviction.

'Your father was mercifully taken from

trouble to come. I don't know what would have become of us all had he lived; for he could not bear hardship or contradiction—I am afraid Dick takes after him. He was like your grandmother, who used to sit all day with her hands folded—beautiful little hands she had, and so had your father.' Winny extended her own two members, to see if they had the paternal features—they were little, but nervous and capable. Her mother observed the action, and added for comment on it: 'I trust you have grit in your character, Winny, though you are a Hesketh.'

'I'm sure I trust so too!' cried Winny devoutly. 'I would not be soft for anything!'

'I shall not bring you up to softness and idleness, you may depend upon that. You must learn to work for your bread, and then, whatever happens, you will be able to take care of yourself. If you are wise, you will never marry.'

'O mother! then I should never have any children!' remonstrated Winny, alarmed, astonished.

'Children are a constant trouble and anxiety.'

'Dick and me, mother?' said Winny with an odd, wistful look.

'Yes, Winny, even Dick and you. There is no telling how you may turn out.'

Winny heaved a prodigious sigh, which woke all the echoes of the old attic where the great yellow chest lived amidst bales of lasting and rolls of leather. It startled even herself, and her mother with grave admonition said: 'You have nothing to sigh for yet, Winny—you had better save your sighs and your tears against the days when they will be really needed. It is much if you are ever as happy after you grow up as you are now while you are a child.'

Winny waxed rather red about the upper part of the cheeks, and her dark eyes glittered, but no drops fell, and she offered no rejoinder to these discouraging previsions of her mother. They returned to the parlour, where Dick was still jubilant and busy over his desk, and the children's supper waited on the round table.

CHAPTER IV.

AUNT AGNES AT COTHAM.

WINNY'S frankly announced wish that Aunt Agnes would come to Cotham had impressed her mother. She took it into serious consideration. Perhaps it was her duty, and might be for their good that she should ask Aunt Agnes to become acquainted with her brother's children, and to consult with her respecting their furnishing and putting out in life. The time was at hand when Dick must make up his mind what he was fit for. The widow Hesketh's means would naturally limit his opportunities, but within a certain range she meant to allow him freedom of choice. The result of the prudent mother's reflections was a letter addressed to Aunt Agnes in the month of May, containing an invitation for herself, her husband and her daughter Lucy for

the month of June, when Mr Andrews would be absent taking his annual holiday, and the drawing-room and best bedroom would be at liberty. The invitation was not imparted to Dick and Winny until it was accepted, and they received the intelligence with joy.

Immediately Mr Andrews vacated his rooms preparations for the visitors began. The up-stairs sitting-room was adorned with fresh muslin curtains, and a new red cover on the table; and Mrs Mason arranged to let Mrs Hesketh have her second-best piano for Miss Lucy's amusement during the visit. Winny walked two miles into the country with Dick on the morning of the day when they were expected, to get some flowers from Nanny Anson, her nurse that was, and brought home a fine posy of purple stocks, sweet-williams, and southern-wood, which she disposed in a green dish, moulded like a vine-leaf. The best china was brought out from its closet, and dusted for daily use, the best candlesticks, the best every-thing, imposing on the children's minds a high sense of the importance of the occasion.

Winny's attire had been carefully revised throughout, and she had leave to wear the converted dove-coloured poplin any fine afternoon when she might be required to walk with her Aunt Agnes or her Cousin Lucy. She did not put it on to receive them, for the coach by which they must come did not arrive at Cotham until eight o'clock; but she put on her next best—that sprigged woollen fabric of which mention has been made before—and felt contented with her neat appearance. Her mother curled her hair, clasped her cornelian necklace, and remarked that she had grown since last summer when her frock was new, and also that it was a pity it had shrunk so much in washing. Winny was unconscious of it, but she had quite out-grown her frock, and presented a very scant and unfashionable shape to the eye of a critical stranger.

The large table in the back-parlour was laid for supper, and at half-past seven Dick sped off to the coach-office at the White Hart, to welcome his mother's coming guests. The widow Hesketh and her little girl betook

themselves upstairs to watch from the sitting-room window for their approach. Winny was fond of looking out at this window, which was a low, wide bay, with side-lights, and commanded the whole Green, and a view of the fields across the river. It had a northern aspect, and only caught a ray or two of sun at setting during the summer months. This June evening was delightful after a showery day. Overhead the sky was all flushed with scarlet reflections that warmed into picturesqueness the tiled, many-gabled old houses both within and without. Winny, turning for a moment to look behind her into the room, saw it transfigured by the soft moted light.

'I hope Aunt Agnes will not be disappointed!' she exclaimed.

The widow continued to gaze into the primrose distances beyond the river. 'Your Aunt Agnes knows what to expect,' said she calmly: and the next minute, 'Here they come!'

Winny's most attentive observation immediately reverted to the Green. Yes, here they

came. The ostler from the White Hart wheeled their luggage in a barrow, conversing, meanwhile, with a red-faced, white-whiskered, elderly gentleman clothed in black, who carried an umbrella, a walking-stick and a pottle of strawberries. He seemed to have legs unwarrantably short for his length of body, and from his gait might be, perhaps, web-footed. Twenty paces after followed Dick, chatting affably with Aunt Agnes, but forgetting to relieve her of an extra shawl. She was slim and slight, and both she and Lucy stepped wearily. The journey had, indeed, been long. The widow Hesketh went downstairs to meet her guests at the door; Winny lingered and listened on the landing above.

The greeting sounded warm and genial, and there was one hearty kiss, at least. The voices of the strangers were all pleasant, and there was some little laughing about Dick's recognition of them. It seemed that as the coach drove up to the White Hart, he had hailed them from the stable-door with a wild 'Halloo!' 'Just like poor George when he

was a boy—always full of fun and spirits,' Aunt Agnes remarked, and it was clear that Dick had leapt, at once, into her favour.

'And this is Winny,' she said, as she toiled upstairs, and was confronted by the little girl.

Winny dropt a quiet 'Yes,' with a smile and a suspicion of a blush. Her Aunt Agnes kissed her, and walked forward into the sitting room: 'What a pretty evening room,' she said, and stood gazing about. The sunset glow had not yet faded from it, and the first impression was very comfortable. Lucy entered —a gentle, long-featured little girl—to whom her father said as he followed her in: 'Lucy, my dear child, you are tired—the sooner you can go to bed the better. Aunt Hesketh will excuse you to-night—a biscuit and a glass of sherry, Anna, if you please, and Lucy shall go to bed.' Winny, at a glance from her mother, ran down to the parlour, and brought up biscuits and wine. As she set the tray on the table Mr Hayland took notice of her, patted her crown, and bestowed upon her one of

his sonorous kisses. Though his face was all over red, it was the agreeable redness of sunburn on an originally fair skin, and Winny approved of it—his eyes were blue, and his hair and whiskers white as silver.

Mr and Mrs Hayland and their daughter Lucy had come to Cotham to spend three weeks. A great deal can be said and done in three weeks. There were many long and interesting evening conversations between the widow Hesketh and Aunt Agnes—long recitals of events past recal, of losses, distresses, mortifications, cruel anxieties and embarrassments which the widow always dismissed with a sigh, and the conclusion that as they were over, it was useless to talk about them any more. But Aunt Agnes wanted to hear. Winny was often present and heard too—heard many things that caused her to reflect. Lucy had brought from town her drawing-board, and had set up her easel in the bay-window to copy in black and white chalk a classic head of Minerva. Winny liked to sit

by, and witness her operations, herself stitching, meanwhile, at Dick's everlasting wants in the way of wristbands. Her mother and Aunt Agnes, side by side upon the sofa against the wall, talked in bated voices. One evening Winny laid this to heart—her mother was speaking :—

'I met with much kindness after poor George was taken away—kindness where I had no right to look for so much as considerateness. Mr Turner sent me his bill receipted—of course, I paid the amount later—and Hurds and Watsons did not send theirs until I wrote for it. Not one house to which money was owing pressed for it. Our old customers continued their support, and the business has been excellent. God has been very good to us. We have wanted for nothing.'

'You have done wonderfully, Anna,' was the response of Aunt Agnes. 'My brother George was allowed to become his own master too early—that was the mischief. He was thrown into gay company before he had the strength to resist its temptations. He did

many foolish things from inexperience, but a warmer heart never beat. He was nobody's enemy but his own, and his friends were naturally disposed to be kind to you for his sake and his children's.—And this house is your property? You have been able to purchase the freehold?'

'Yes. It was to be sold, and unless I had bought it, I must have left it, which would, perhaps, have injured the business. Mr Andrews advanced me part of the purchase-money for one year.'

'You have fallen in with generous helpers, Anna.'

'I have everything to be thankful for. If the children turn out well, I shall be satisfied.'

'Dick is a dear little fellow. Winny is at an awkward age. Is she clever at all?—she seems given to wool-gathering.'

'Dick has one fault—he is idle,' said his mother. 'Winny is self-willed, but Mrs Mason gives a good account of her capacity.'

The widow Hesketh never fondled or flattered her children; she spoke of them as dispassion-

ately as if they did not belong to her. Aunt Agnes was silent for a minute or two, and her eyes dwelt contemplatively on Winny, always attired in her unbecoming frock, her thin neck and arms uncovered, as little girls went at that period, and her brown hair combed behind her ears in short curls. To her Aunt Agnes she was not attractive. She had a shy, eager way with her—she watched and listened, and seemed to take in everything, and make silent notes upon it. She had attached herself to her Cousin Lucy, whose skill on the piano and with her pencil she exceedingly admired. Winny could use a pencil herself, but it was in an untaught way, and her sketches from nature leant to caricature. Mrs Mason's programme of education did not necessarily include accomplishments, and Winny Hesketh had been sent to her to acquire what was called at that date, a solid foundation—to wit, reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, English grammar, and history; but proving a child easy to teach and willing to learn, her mother had, at Mrs Mason's request, added to her school-books

during the last twelve months, Goldsmith's "Greece and Rome," and Blair's "Universal Preceptor; or General Grammar of Arts, Sciences, and Useful Knowledge;" by which means Winny was acquiring (metaphorically) an early tinge of blue in her stockings. Also she had lessons from the French master.

'It will be easy enough to dispose of Dick,' Aunt Agnes re-commenced. 'His uncle must talk to him. But what can be done with a girl like Winny by way of making her independent, I don't know.'

'Mrs Mason suggests to me to make a teacher of her—to train her up for the purpose.'

'Poor Winny, what a dreadful prospect! O Anna, much better save the money you would spend on her education to give her when she marries,' Aunt Agnes cried with an energy of opinion that she seldom evinced.

The widow Hesketh did not move a muscle. 'If men were always what they ought to be I should not discourage a girl from looking forward to marriage as a provision; but marriage is such a lottery that if Winny has the power

to help and maintain herself, I should never advise her to risk it.'

Aunt Agnes wondered greatly at these sentiments of her sister-in-law, and she did not give in to them. 'If we could foresee and forestall every accident of life, Anna, there would be no need of the providence of God,' said she with grave insistance.

The widow Hesketh rejoined with as convinced a mind: 'A little money soon runs away, but if Winny gets her modest fortune in the shape of an available education nothing can rob her of it.'

Aunt Agnes knew how soon her sister-in-law's little money had run away, but she knew also that it was not her much learning that had lifted her out of her difficulties; for the widow's orthography was very imperfect, and though by dint of native shrewdness, industry, and prudence she could earn an income, and live well within it, the higher rules of arithmetic were an unknown region to her. She did not argue the matter of Winny's education any further then, for she caught the child's intent eyes upon them,

and judged it discreet to forbear, but she renewed it later, in Winny's absence. The widow Hesketh only assured her again that she was firmly purposed to make her little girl self-helpful, so that to be married might never present itself to her as the sole way out of a dilemma. The widow had no covert meaning in this allusion, but Aunt Agnes coloured as if she was struck home—and indeed, her own marriage had been one of expedience.

Mrs Hesketh continued: 'Until Mrs Mason praised Winny's readiness at learning I had thoughts of bringing her up as a milliner—she has the requisite taste and neatness,—but she does not love her needle.'

'Oh, no! Pray, don't let us have another milliner in the family,' Aunt Agnes replied testily. 'Let her be a teacher—if she must be anything.' And Winny's destiny was henceforth treated of as settled. Dick's was next to be considered.

Mr Hayland did not share his wife's partiality for Dick. 'I wish Winny were the boy—there is twice the stuff in her that there is in Dick,' he

said to her. 'Dick will never work more than he can help, and his first and last thought is to please himself.'

Aunt Agnes looked annoyed: 'I was hoping that you might take him into the office, and that he might even live with us at home,' she said.

'That is a step that requires deliberation—great deliberation. Dick has caught your fancy.'

'He reminds me of my brother George—and it would be a substantial help to Anna, who really deserves it,' urged Aunt Agnes.

'It would be the making of the boy if there were any pith in him—but I doubt. One thing must be clearly understood—if Dick Hesketh comes into Bread Street, he must come prepared to conform to the rules of the house, and to take no liberties.'

'Certainly not—he would meet with no encouragement from me. I may mention it to Anna?'

Mr Hayland assented, only adding that Dick must remain two years longer at the Grammar School; for a liberal education was likely to be

more and more to a man's advantage in an age of progress—and to a woman's also.

'Then you don't think that Anna will be doing foolishly in giving Winny a superior education?' his wife asked. 'I confess that I would rather keep the money in hand myself, and keep her at home in a useful capacity—such a plain little girl as she is too.'

'She will improve. Anna knows what she is about—Winny is very fond of a book.'

'Very fond of a story-book, of novels and plays and poetry. Anna does not take sufficient care what she reads—I suppose she has not time. Winny had her head buried in Shakspeare's play of "King Lear" this morning until the last minute before prayers. And on Sunday afternoon, when I thought she was studying a good book it was a little old brown volume of the "Spectator" she had got hold of. Her mother allows her the run of poor George's books, and there are some of them not at all nice books for a girl.'

'You must not furnish the child with a mature comprehension; she will find no harm

in them. She has a great number of fine pieces by heart which she says she learns while she is at stitch work. Let her alone. Her father's books are a standard collection—I was thinking this morning how and when he could have made it.'

Aunt Agnes was silent. There had been a time, perhaps, when great things were hoped of her brother George—when, perhaps, he had hoped great things of himself. To this day his sister believed that if he had married in his own rank, instead of marrying the clever, handsome Hulton milliner who had brought him only a thousand pound fortune and her severe principles, he would have held up his head and flourished. It is needless to say that Mr Hayland did not share his wife's faith. All his respect was for the widow whom he was ever ready to befriend and help, and who did such credit to her helpers.

The grand proposal, as Aunt Agnes meant it, for Dick's adoption into the house of Hayland & Co., did not, however, win Mrs Hesketh's immediate approval and acceptance. She even

went so far as to state to Mr Hayland confidentially that she did not consider that Dick had a talent for business, any more than his father had. Something in the light artistic line, compatible with frequent intervals of leisure, would be more in his way. Mr Hayland hardly knew how to answer her, though her judgment of her son agreed with his own. He said that Dick must try to overcome his natural indolence, and acquire habits of application; and he undertook to give Dick a lecture on the moral elements of success in life. Dick listened languidly until mention was made of London, and then he brightened up, and was willing to promise anything and everything that was desirable. For that day he became a most obliging boy. He escorted Aunt Agnes and Lucy to the 'Retreat' as a delightful walk. Aunt Agnes expected some sort of beautiful, bowery wood or garden, but when they came to the locked gates and high walls, and she heard that it was an asylum for mad quakers, she almost ran home again, scolding him all the way, and making no allowance for his good intentions. It was for long

after a joke with Lucy against her Cousin Dick that he had taken her mamma, the timidest of women, to a lunatic asylum by way of amusement.

It is probable that Aunt Agnes found the entertainment provided for her in the house of her sister-in-law dull. Winny made one little effort on her behalf, but Winny was not a favourite, and it was scarcely more successful than Dick's. The child was not blind to the fact that except Mrs Mason, who was absent at the sea-side, they had no friend in Cotham whose acquaintance was likely to be courted by the great. But a mile and a half out of the town, at Holworth Grange, there lived a family consisting of Mr and Mrs Knox and Mrs Fleetwood who had a beautiful garden with roses and tall lilies and fruit in its season, and prim parlours with oval framed portraits on the walls, where the ladies of the house appeared to preside permanently in silk mittens. This residence was the occasional limit of a summer Sunday evening walk, and once a year, in the

time of ripe gooseberries and currants, the widow Hesketh and her children were formally invited to drink tea there, and sent home with nosegays. This annual visit was almost as notable an event for the children as the arrival of the New Year's parcel from London, but Winny had a feeling that her mother made it, not because she enjoyed it herself, but because it was such a treat to Dick and her. Dick was famous at the gooseberries.

It happened one morning that Winny, sent out on an errand to Miss Baxter's shop (it was a chemist's shop which had also a licence to sell tea) met Mr Knox, a man of singularly unprosperous aspect, considering that he was the man of the house at Holworth Grange. He greeted Winny as 'Little Miss,' asked how her mother did, and mentioned that the currants were coming on finely.

'Aunt Agnes is staying with us—she is *so* fond of a garden—and Uncle Hayland and Cousin Lucy,' Winny announced, and then she blushed, and felt shy lest Mr Knox should discern the desire of her heart that the invitation

to Holworth Grange might come soon, an include her mother's guests.

'We'll see,' said the gentleman nodding shaking hands and walking off, all at the sam time—and it was clear to Winny that he ha found her out. She was divided between sense of shame at having, as it were, asked fo the invitation, and a sense of expectation tha it might come. And it did come the very nex day, brought by Mr Knox himself, and the were to go in the afternoon.

The weather was perfect, absolutely perfec and Aunt Agnes donned her silk attire withou one qualm. Lucy was neat in muslin, an Winny put on her poplin frock, white tippe and straw bonnet trimmed with straw-coloure ribbon, which was her Sunday suit.

'Won't the child be very hot in that thic poplin frock?' Aunt Agnes remarked, eyein her disapprovingly when they were assemble to start.

Winny's quick blood was in her cheeks a once, and she glanced at her mother who sai with the utmost serenity: 'She has no other

unless she choose to put on a clean print—that would be cooler. Would you like to change your frock, Winny? We will be sauntering on—you will soon overtake us.' The little girl answered with a gesture of silent assent, and turned back to go upstairs.

The rest all set out, and Winny stayed behind. Susan came to help her, but the alteration in her dress was not effected without a few very salt tears. She was, indeed, cruelly dismayed by Aunt Agnes's cold, critical regards. It was a miserable moment for the child. She did not accuse her aunt of being unkind, but she accused herself of being ugly, ungainly, and ill-dressed, and was humiliated beyond words to tell. 'Don't fret, dear, or you'll make your eyes smart,' said the servant soothingly; and Winny repressed the swelling in her throat, and wiped the scalding drops from her cheeks, but she could not get over her feeling of mortification. When she was ready to start again Susan went to the door with her, and watched her out of sight: 'They've spoilt her pleasure, poor little thing,' said she with tender pity.

And no doubt Winny's pleasure was like a peach with the bloom off. The substance was there, but not the beauty. She made no haste to overtake those who had gone on before. Several times her mother looked back, and when they came to the bridge at the foot of the Holworth Road, Dick offered to wait for his sister. Winny's countenance cleared when she saw him in the distance, and her spirits revived when he condoled with her on her bother in having to change her frock. She asked him if he thought Aunt Agnes would like *this* frock. 'I would not care whether she did or not; you look as nice as any of them,' replied Dick defiantly.

It was impossible that Dick's opinion on clothes could be of the same value as the opinion of Aunt Agnes who lived in London, but it was comforting; and when they reached the gate of Holworth Grange, and Mrs Fleetwood gave the wistful little girl a kiss, and said: 'Always spick and span, Winny,' and handed her over for the same affectionate process to Mrs Knox, her heart

swelled with grateful appreciation of their benevolence.

The introduction of Mr and Mrs Hayland and Lucy had been already accomplished, and a procession was formed to the house—Mrs Knox and Aunt Agnes going first, Mrs Fleetwood and the widow Hesketh next, then the three children, and the two gentlemen last. Mr Knox had on his usual shabby clothing, and humble, dejected manner, but he talked agreeably, and Mr Hayland turned into the garden with him instead of following the ladies indoors. Dick also stayed out, and went to the gooseberries like an old acquaintance.

The prim parlour had not deviated from its primness one hair's-breadth since last summer. There were the portraits simpering in crayons, and the flowery devices in tent-stitch on the chairs, and on the tables were books with engravings and etchings in them. The elders of the party sat round in formal state, with hands folded in their laps, conversing; and the little girls sat at the open window, Lucy turning over the contents of a red folio which she balanced

upon the sill, and Winny, who knew the pictures, taking now long looks into the green vistas of the garden, and then observant glances at the solemn conclave dropping, in turn, their measured sentences.

Winny Hesketh had one of those memories that keep a panoramic record of events. She never forgot how the parlour at Holworth Grange looked on this summer afternoon, nor the figures in it. Mrs Knox was a small, plain woman of old-fashioned courtesy, dressed in faded brown silk, with as many pink bows in her cap as the highest fashion in Cotham demanded. Mrs Fleetwood was tall, and of a large and loose rather than stout figure. She moved with an air, and her chintz-patterned cotton gown had a certain grace borrowed from the wearer. She retained still at sixty the handsome features, the fine complexion and the laughing eyes of a beauty, and her voice was delightful. She was Mr Knox's sister, and Winny had heard of her, as if it were something reprehensible, that she had been upon the stage—had been an actress;

and all at once it flashed into the child's mind that if Aunt Agnes knew, she would be shocked to find herself in such bad company. Aunt Agnes's own appearance was irreproachable, but probably the reflection was forced upon her, as it was upon Winny, that her second-best silk would have been grand enough for this occasion.

The conversation went far back into the past—as far back as Mrs Hesketh's coming to Cotham on her marriage—and was adorned with sentiments that had all the value of antiquity, and the weight of universal consent.

Mrs Knox spoke like an oracle: 'There's a many ups and downs in the world, of which it is hard to say that they are this one's fault or that one's fault, and it is no more than Christian, when we are at the top of the wheel, to keep in mind that there may be folks as worthy or worthier under it, and that the next turn may lower ourselves.'

'Exactly so. "We know what we are, but we know not what we may be,"' said Mrs Fleetwood with a nod of intelligence at Winny, who

nodded back her answer that she knew where that quotation came from.

'The common-sense of the matter is, that as men sow they reap, particularly in business; and the belief that success follows on upright dealing need not be shaken,' said the widow Hesketh with grave decision. Winny wondered whether Mr Knox who looked so unlucky had sown tares for seed, or had stood all the morning idle in the market-place, instead of sowing at all.

'But whether we succeed or fail this we may rely on—there's nothing to gain in this world that's worth doing wrong for. You hear that, children?' said Mrs Knox, and a murmur of approval confirmed her words.

The children heard, but Lucy in turning her head when attention was called, let the folio slip, and several of the loose sheets fluttered out of the window. 'Take care, little girl, those etchings are valuable—Cuitts,' said Mrs Fleetwood rising to the rescue. 'Winny dear, go out quick, and gather them up, or Ruffles will have them.' Ruffles was Mr

Knox's dog—a frilly sagacious white poodle, not, however, discriminating in etchings. This incident created a movement and diversion, and after tea everybody went out of doors.

The garden was in great beauty that beautiful evening, or Winny thought so. She glanced many times in Aunt Agnes's face to see how she was impressed. Not profoundly, to judge from her countenance. She knew gayer gardens it might be—yet this was crowded with fragrant flowers—with lilies and roses, sweet-briar and lavender, pinks and carnations, stocks and mignonette, verbenas and geraniums. A tall hedge of yew made a background for their splendid colours. Through an arch cut in its green density was the way to the fruit-bushes, whither Lucy had gone with her father. Aunt Agnes would not go; so Mrs Fleetwood stayed with her on the broad gravel path, and Winny made a third. Not for long, however. Aunt Agnes was soon tired of sauntering—also in a shady place where the sun had not drunk up the dew a cluster-rose sprinkled her spotless dress.

'It is only water, it will not leave a mark,' said Winny—but it did leave a mark, not only on the silk but in her aunt's memory. And now she would return to the parlour.

Mrs Fleetwood chatted pleasantly on a variety of things, on the news and amusements of the world, and frankly confessed that she envied Mrs Hayland her residence in London. 'The fields are peaceful and rural and all that, and the singing of the little birds is sweet when the leaves are coming out, but give me the life and noises of the town, and the smell of the lamps,' said she.

Mrs Hayland avowed her preference for the town also, but languidly, and mentioned that the evening was drawing in, and that she hoped the walk home would not be too much for dear Lucy. Winny felt sorry—she could not but see that Aunt Agnes was impatient for the visit to be over; she slipped off to the garden again, found her mother, and whispered that she thought Aunt Agnes was tired, and wanted to go. Soon after they were on the road back to Cotham; Dick and

Winny between them carrying a basket of fruit, and all the nosegays, that nobody's kid gloves might be spoilt. Winny's were only of thread, and them she put in her pocket. And Aunt Agnes never said that it had been an agreeable visit, or that she had enjoyed it.

No one told Winny Hesketh that her Aunt Agnes's life was a lingering disappointment, but some such notion did certainly suggest itself to her mind. Aunt Agnes had been very pretty, was still elegant, and still kept up her accomplishments. She had married Mr Hayland, a man old enough to be her father, at the urgent desire of her family, when the cloud of adversity began to gather over their house. Mr. Hayland lived in quite another sphere—amongst the strictly religious, to whom plays, dances, and worldly delights were all tabooed. He was a good man, sincere, but intensely obstinate, and his young wife never had a chance of prevailing against his prejudices—principles, he called them. She succumbed, verbally adopted his opinions, but kept her own

longings. Winny discerned this somehow, and pitied her aunt—the constant displeasure of a life against the grain was easily comprehensible to her imagination.

Beyond this unexpressed compassion she had no sympathy with her Aunt Agnes, but Lucy she loved. She never ceased to remember the neat figure of her cousin sitting on the music-stool in the Sunday evening-light, her small hands eliciting sweet sacred chords from Mrs Mason's second-best piano. Lucy improvised these chords, her chin in the air, her eyes lifted to the sunset glow upon the dusky wainscot. She did not sing aloud, but Winny gazing in her rapt countenance knew that she was singing holy words in her heart. These were beautiful moments, moments of exceeding comfort to Winny. It was so peaceful alone with Lucy when the rest were at church. It put her into a religious frame of mind, and the things that vexed and wearied her every day were forgotten. The service at St Stephen's was not calculated to awaken a dormant enthusiasm. Old Mr Musty, the vicar, was so

very old and mumbly that he never broke the wandering current of anybody's thoughts. The blind organist who felt every note of his music, drew Winny's soul to the heights with a glorious, triumphant psalm sometimes, but in those days emotional pious fiction was almost unknown, and she grew up without suffering any spiritual trials or afflictions, and practically conscious of only two rules for the conduct of the Christian life—to be good, and trust God. It is not asserted that she kept them—for trust in God there had not come yet any special call to her, and of the goodness of little girls before they are tested there can be no surety. She dearly loved her own way, and she was inattentive at church—two patent sins.

St Stephen's had many distractions for the imaginative mind. It was ancient—a church of six centuries, at least,—and within eye-range of the widow Hesketh's pew was an immense table of benefactions to the poor of the parish, which bore frequent readings. Besides the interest that radiated from the doles of the dead there were their monuments, also very

suggestive, and the windows of the aisles, rich in kaleidoscope perplexity of scripture story, and armorial glazings that had been patched into very enigmas of heraldry. All these aids to reflection Winny Hesketh used in her private musings during the long half-hour of inaudible instruction from the pulpit. And again, when the congregation stood up during the reading of the psalms, her eyes roved, taking note of the queer old folks in the free seats, of the miserable sinners in fashionable clothes, and of here and there a face—faces, beautiful or peculiar, had a fascination for Winny.

'Winny never looks at her book,' Aunt Agnes remarked. 'She might have been in a dream all the time of service.' Nevertheless, when called upon, Winny was found able to repeat the collect and gospel, and she knew what the lessons were about.

'Winny can learn whatever she gives her mind to,' said her mother. 'If she does wrong, it is not for want of knowing what is right.'

'Mr Musty's retirement would be for the benefit of his congregation. I myself could not

gather the pith of his discourse this morning,' said Mr Hayland.

'It is always the same,' cried Winny irreverently. '"My brethren, if you follow the commandments of God, it will go well with you in this world, and better in the next; my fellow-sinners, if you pursue your own devices, it will go hard with you in this world—with regard to the next, far be it from me to limit the divine mercies. I pray that we may all repent in time, and take hold of the great salvation. But if we do not, there is, as Dr Watts assures us, A dreadful hell and everlasting pains, Where sinners must with devils dwell, In darkness, fire, and chains."'

'Hold your tongue, Winny! You are quite profane,' interrupted Aunt Agnes.

'I am afraid it means that Winny does not believe what Dr Watts says,' remarked Uncle Hayland solemnly.

There was dead silence in the room, and Lucy was troubled to see that Winny gloomed, and laughed, betook herself to a secular work for amusement the whole of the afternoon, never

lifting her head or speaking to anybody again. Lucy was born good; she had a natural humility—not the least rare of Christian graces. She had no difficulty in thinking of others as better than herself. She had taken to Winny, and even looked up to her. She admired her patience at dull tasks, her courage and cheerful contentment—or what seemed such to her. Lucy was delicate and tender, and it was everybody's duty and delight to make her path smooth and easy, but in Winny's path stones to stumble at, and thorns and briars to catch her, were plentiful. Then Winny's devotion to her little cousin had its influence. In the evening, when they were left alone, Winny put the 'Spectator' away, and Lucy drew out those thrills of sacred music that soothed and comforted her. It was their last evening together at Cotham.

CHAPTER V.

THE DRAWING-CLASS.

THE Midsummer holidays were nearly over when the widow Hesketh's visitors returned to London. Dick went back to the Grammar School, and Winny went back to Mrs Mason's, preceded by an intimation from her mother that her education was henceforward to be prosecuted with a view to its being of use to her as a means of livelihood. This made no present difference. Winny went on learning her usual repetitions, reading Goldsmith's Histories, and infusing her memory with the formidable array of facts contained in the Universal Preceptor. She took her music-lessons and her French lessons without much aversion, and as far as sitting next to Mr Hollingshed went, she profited by the instruction which he gave at the school thrice a week in writing and arithmetic;

but she had no turn for arithmetic, and when the old master had set her a sum she waited until he was at liberty to help her do it. He always did help her, and perhaps thought her a stupid little girl, though he never told her so; and when the class stood up to say tables, he as invariably asked her nine times nine, which he must have been aware was the only question she was sure to answer right.

The following summer Mrs Mason proposed that drawing should be added to the list of her pupil's acquirements, but as there was not time in the regular school-hours an arrangement was entered into for Dick and Winny to go together of an evening to Mr Cave, the Cotham drawing-master, who lived on the Holworth Road. Under Mr Cave the children learnt to make copies in pencil of rustic stiles and hovels, and then of various foliage and picturesque foreign buildings, according to Harding. These lessons, and the walk to and fro to the drawing master's house, brought them acquainted with others of his pupils. There was a young Cairns whose mother was a poor person living

in Cricklegate, and a young Stanford, also of humble parentage, whom Mr Cave taught for love of the talent they had. Dick Hesketh could not hold a pencil with either of them—he had no gift at all; but then the occupation kept him out of mischief during the long light evenings, and her mother could not send Winny to walk so far alone. Winny had a pretty touch, Mr Cave said, but he gave Dick no encouragement—his trees were like birch-brooms.

When the days grew short in October the drawing-lessons were intermitted, to be resumed when they lengthened again in March. They were continued all through the fine weather, except for a month at midsummer, when Mr Cave went to Normandy on a sketching-tour. Cairns had talked of going with him, but when it came to counting the cost the lad's money fell short. Stanford, however, who had indulged no hope, was surprised with a present from Mr Caleb, an artist of famous repute, a native of Cotham, which enabled him to go. Dick Hesketh was smitten with a wish to be of the

party, but when he hinted it, the master only said, '*You*—if it were your sister, now. But sketching-tours are not for little girls.' Winny looked up from her drawing-board, and blushed, and then looked down again, and went on with her copy, meditating the sad, invincible impediment of sex.

Cairns, forbidden by fortune to wander far a-field, walked up the windings of the Foss, not a river of celebrated beauty as the Wye is, but with modest charms of its own which the intelligent young fellow had shrewd eyes for. He brought back a folio of drawings in water-colours, and Dick Hesketh was invited to escort his sister to Cricklegate that she might see them. Mrs Hesketh demurred, but Winny had an ardent desire to go. They went one delicious July evening. The door of Cairns's home opened direct from the street into the living-room, which was two steps below its level. It was daintily clean, and had abundant light from the broad, lozenge-paned lattice that extended along the whole front of the house. Some fine flowering plants on the sill formed

a blind, and under it was a table where Cairns stood to exhibit the results of his walk up the river. Winny cried out in admiration of this sunny bit and that sunny bit—her love was all for sunshine. Unobserved the lad's mother had come in, leaving a door open to the garden; and when the sketches had been passed in review, and Winny turned round, she saw a hard-working woman, from the appearance of her, standing against the hearth, listening with a proud smile on her face.

'Take comfort, Ted—you might have gone further and done worse,' said she. 'The prettiest picture of all is nearest home—Holworth Mill and the weir. The willows and their shadows in the water are to the very life.'

'Of course, my mother is pleased with my work,' said Cairns looking kindly towards her. Then to Winny: 'Will you step into the garden?—you are fond of a garden, I have heard.'

The folio was closed, and Dick and Winny walked out into the garden. It was a good space, full of fruit-trees, and extending to what

had been once the Castle-wall. The ground rose and fell abruptly, and the further slope was crowded with nut-bushes.

'This was the moat,' said Cairns, leading the way. 'Look at that pear-tree,' pointing to an immense, luxuriant pyramid of foliage. 'It may be a hundred years old. It never has any pears on it, but in autumn, when the leaves are dying, it glows like flames.'

Winny Hesketh gazed about with wistful pleasure and longing, and transferred a permanent picture of the scene to her memory. Cairns asked if there was no garden behind her house. 'Nothing to call a garden,' Winny answered. 'There may have been formerly, but if so, it must have passed into the possession of our next-door neighbour long since. We have a wall covered with ivy, and a border under it where we sow mignonette, but it does not thrive—it does not like itself there.'

'Let me give you some flowers—mother, bring the scissors to cut some flowers, will you?'

Mrs Cairns complied, and cut the flowers

herself with more prudence than her boy would have done. Winny Hesketh did not say nay to her bounty, and she carried home as sweet and beautiful a nosegay as the nosegays from Holworth Grange.

The widow Hesketh made a return on her children's behalf by bidding Dick bring young Cairns to tea some day, and Cairns consenting, they all became friends together.

The record of incidents befalling thus early in a life may seem trivial, but they have their significance. They go towards the forming of character, and the shaping of destiny. What sounds a mere idle word may have its mission.

Mr Cave and young Stanford returned from their tour successfully. Stanford came back rich in sepia studies of architecture, and the next time Dick and Winny Hesketh went to take their drawing-lesson they were treated to a sight of them. Mr Caleb came in that evening, an ugly little man pitted with the small-pox, to whom Mr Cave said, bowing low: 'This is an honour indeed, Mr Caleb.'

The ugly little man walked from easel to

easel, found something kind to say to Cairns, and something very encouraging to add to Stanford, whose sketches from Normandy he examined with critical carefulness. 'If you live, Sir, and work—work, Sir, mind—you will be second to no man in this branch of art,' he said emphatically, clapping against the wall the powerful, rough sketch that had elicited the prediction.

Everybody looked at Stanford, who was a solid, even-tempered, good-natured young fellow, large framed and rather coarse featured, but with handsome eyes that lit up his countenance amazingly. These eyes brightened all round upon the company, and then, with a well-satisfied nod, he fell to his pencil again.

Mr Caleb passed by Dick Hesketh, but coming in view of Winny, he stared at her. Winny had her head a little on one side, her brows a little knit. Disturbed by his observation she looked up with a lingering withdrawal of her attention from her business, and met his gaze. He came nearer, and approved her very painstaking copy of an elaborate pile of build-

ings on a hill—a fortified Rhine town, probably —and then stared in her face again. Finally, rapping her on the crown with the back of his forefinger, he said: 'Here is a head that may make itself heard of one of these fine days.'

'You are by way of being a prophet this evening, Mr Caleb,' said the drawing-master pleasantly.

Winny Hesketh coloured, and the expression of her eyes was not the surprised, joyful anticipation that had kindled young Stanford's, but a sort of shy, troubled indifference. She had read somewhere that the happiest women are those who have no history. Of course, Dick informed his mother of Mr Caleb's remark upon his sister. The widow looked grave.

'There are many ways of being heard of,' said she. 'I trust that Winny will be a good girl, and do her duty as a good teacher. It could be no advantage to her to be heard of in any other way.'

Nevertheless Winny laid up Mr Caleb's words in her heart, and let her imagination play with them sometimes.

Soon after—it was in September—occurred one of those events that make us, when we are new to life, wonder with dreadful awe at its inscrutableness. One day Dick mentioned, on coming in from school, that Stanford had got a fever.

'Then keep away from the house, lest you catch it, and bring it here,' said his mother, imperative in her alarm.

'All right,' said Dick coolly. 'I never meant to go near it.'

Dick did not go near it, but Winny, who now more often than not walked to Mrs Mason's by herself, after considering for one day, went round the next to Stanford's home, and inquired how he did. The person who answered her was his aunt, a care-worn, ill-dressed woman. 'He is no better—he is worsening. Who is it that asks?' said she.

Winny explained herself as a fellow-pupil of Stanford's at the drawing-class. The poor woman seemed to forget herself; she gazed beyond Winny for a minute, and then spoke, so wearily, so sadly. 'The doctor says we must

not hope to keep him—we have brought him up only to lose him. And just when Mr Caleb had promised such great things of him if he lived!'

Every day after until the blinds were down and the shutters closed Winny passed by the house, but she called no more at the door. One noon Dick announced for news that Stanford was dead. Winny knew it already. That evening she sat, as usual, with her lesson-books before her at the round table opposite her brother. Purposely neither he nor her mother took any notice of her; for it was both seen and felt that she had very much ado to suppress her tears. Between her and life had risen up like a new revelation the tremendous certainty of death, and she was realising it as only a vivid young imagination can. At last, Dick in an impulse of kindness said: 'There's "The Bride of Lammermoor," Winny,' offering her the volume. But Winny shook her head, and put it aside with her hand silently. This real tragedy of Stanford's death penetrated her more deeply than all the tragedies written in books.

She slept in her mother's room still, and when the widow went up to bed, she heard a stifled sob. 'Don't cry, Winny—think if it had been Dick,' said she remonstrating.

It remained long a marvel to Winny Hesketh how lightly this death of a most promising young fellow seemed to pass amongst elder people. Stanford's funeral took place on a Tuesday morning. In the evening Dick and his sister went to their drawing-lesson. Mr Cave moved his lost pupil's easel out of the way.

'Poor lad! Mr Caleb prophesied that he would do something grand if he lived,' was his sole expression of regret. And then he corrected the perspective of Dick Hesketh's last essay, adding for that ill-furnished youth's benefit: '*You* never will—in art, at least. What you may do at a desk remains to be tried.'

CHAPTER VI.

THE MANOR SCHOOL.

THAT half-year closed Dick Hesketh's probation at the Grammar School, and shortly after Christmas, being then over sixteen, he said good-bye to Cotham, and went up to London, to Mr Hayland's house and office, with a store of Whittingtonian aspirations in his heart, but very little Whittingtonian ballast to sustain them. His mother kissed him, and hoped for the best; his sister kissed him, and was sorry. They had always been good friends and allies.

For yet another six months Winny Hesketh continued at Mrs Mason's school, her occasional companion in Dick's room being a girl of her own age, Delphine Mercier, the French master's daughter, who, like herself, was destined to the independence that comes of work. Delphine

was more English than foreign, her mother and her breeding being English, and her gift was a facility in acquiring languages; but she took her drawing-lessons with Mr Cave, and her music-lessons with Mr Anderson, as Winny did. Equality of fortune and similarity of tastes drew them together, and formed a bond of friendship that was not broken when Delphine went to Switzerland to complete her studies amongst her father's relations, and Winny passed from Mrs Mason's charge into that famous ladies' seminary, Cotham Manor School.

The Manor School had been established over a century, and thither still went for their education many daughters of the county families, whose mothers and grandmothers and great-grandmothers had been there before them. On a lozenge-pane of the fine oriel window at the end of the long corridor there was scratched with a diamond ring, under the date of 1729, this familiar distich—

'If you love me as I love you,
Nought but death shall part us two.'

The names of Dorothy Maxwell and Bell Cholmley were signed below, and there had been a Dorothy Maxwell and Elizabeth Cholmley at the school within living memory. The tradition was that none but young gentlewomen were received there, but the exclusiveness of the school was abating since the fashion of private governesses had come up, and when Winny Hesketh was admitted, on the footing of half-boarder, there were several pupils whose parents resided in Cotham, and others from the neighbourhood whose families were of more wealth than ancient dignity. But even a ladies' seminary is in some sort a republic. Long descent, taxed with stupidity, drops to the lowest place in the class, and fine wit heads it, no matter whence it sprang.

Winny Hesketh did not enter there without negotiation. Mrs Mason opened the treaty, and Mrs Brunton called upon the widow Hesketh in her house on Castle Green for the express purpose of seeing how the girl lived at home. She was received in the gloomy back-parlour. The widow sat calm and dignified in her corner

chair; Winny stood by the table, a thin, unformed figure of fourteen, with abundance of brown hair, a healthy complexion, large dark eyes that were not afraid to look anybody in the face, and a mouth that had a trick of expression not always in her favour. Her dress was economical as ever—out-grown and unfashionable.

Mrs Brunton invited her to play a passage from a sonata that was open on the desk of the piano. Winny obeyed—and her music was pronounced sufficient. Then she translated a few lines of Voltaire's 'Charles XII.'—her French also would do. And then she took a chair, and listened reflectively while the schoolmistress explained her future duties and position to her mother.

'She will be called Miss Winifred, not Miss Hesketh. She will have to hear the little ones practise, and to help them in the preparation of their lessons, and to assist them in dressing and undressing—in fact, to make herself generally useful; and I trust she will do it with diligence and cheerfulness.'

'Winny is not idle,' said her mother.

'And with regard to her own improvement, she must avail herself of every opportunity, of every spare moment—a governess wants not so much high accomplishment as the faculty of using what she knows. She will take her lessons with the masters—and she must work—she must make time for herself.' Here Mrs Brunton paused to admit of a reply; but receiving none, she proceeded: 'It is the custom of the school to dine at four o'clock, and the young ladies dress for dinner. Miss Winifred will require her morning dresses up to the throat, and with long sleeves, and in her evening dresses just a simple tucker of muslin or lace. A bonnet with blue ribbons, and a white dress with a blue belt or sash for Sundays and holydays, will also be necessary.'

That Winny Hesketh might enjoy these privileges and distinctions her mother covenanted to pay for her board one half the sum paid annually by the parents and guardians of the other pupils, and for her lessons with masters the full charge. And under these

arrangements she went to the Manor School after the midsummer holidays, and was launched into an entirely strange society.

The widow Hesketh had borne open testimony that her little girl was not idle, but, unfortunately for Winny, none of the chief authorities at the Manor School believed in the willing horse, and the more she toiled in her vocation, the more was laid upon her to do. On those fortnightly Saturday afternoons when she went home, her mother thought she looked overtasked, but Winny did not complain, and when she was questioned she denied it. She said very little at home of what was done at school. She had lived in the bracing atmosphere of reserve and control, and her early habits were not relaxed. To begin with, she was put into the second class amongst girls of her own age, but the test of ability was the 'Subject,' a so-called original composition that had to be produced once a month by every girl, from the eldest to the youngest; and Winny, having some turn that way, was so happy in her first essay that Mrs Brunton

moved her, there and then, into the first class, and admonished the head girls to look to their laurels. There could be no real rivalry, however, for the half-boarder did not compete for prizes, and Winny's merit was its own reward. Not that she cared — she was never of an emulous or envious disposition. Her classfellows were now all older than herself, and the incessant occupation of her days prevented her seeking the companionship of any one above the rest. She had as yet no powerful friend, when there happened a crisis in her affairs which brought the first chapter of her experiences at the Manor School to an unimagined and abrupt conclusion.

Mr Hollingshed, Mr Cave, and Mr Anderson were still Winny's masters. Mr Hollingshed was indulgent as ever to his stupid little pupil; Mr Cave soon discovered that she had no leisure to work for him in his absence, and was resigned; but Mr Anderson found fault with her imperfectly-practised pieces, and said she was falling off instead of improving. Then she told him that she had no time to practise until

after the young ladies were in bed—from nine till ten o'clock—and she did the best she could. The reasonable man shrugged his shoulders, and was answered. But Miss Hubbard, the English teacher, had no such considerateness in her soul. The futile system of repetitions without change or omission of one word was in full force at this period, and it was her business to hear them. Winny could get the fluent sense of her lessons easily, but get their phrases verbatim in brief odd moments between other duties she never could; and when she pleaded that she had no time for herself wherein to learn them, Miss Hubbard confounded her with that stereotyped, useful advice to drudges, to *make time*, which she had already carried out to the utmost elasticity of her waking-hours. So next she stole an hour from her morning-sleep, and often, when the maids crept downstairs in the cold November darkness, a thread of light that slid through a chink of the schoolroom door betrayed Miss Winifred at her silent tasks. There was a prudent woman amongst them who mentioned the fact to Mrs Brunton,

and a cup of milk and thick slice of bread were henceforward left on her desk over-night; but no *veto* was put on her early rising, and by degrees her work, or her anxiety about it, curtailed her rest until many a morning she heard the clock at St Stephen Martyr's strike four after she had lighted her candle, and opened her books. Nor would this discipline of hard labour have done her any mischief had she earned thereby a word of encouragement, or even leave to be at peace. But Miss Hubbard still found too much occasion to dispraise her, and Winny, vexed at her injustice, and grown irritable from the strain upon her nerves, offered sometimes a sigh for rejoinder, but quite as often a smile too significant to be pleasant, or a few caustic words that bit into the memory, and left their mark. Miss Hubbard was a pre-eminently dull woman, but she had many advantages as against Miss Winifred. Perhaps she did not use them with intentional maliciousness, but there came a time when it was not necessary to be a prophet to foresee that every day made a grave collision between

the two more and more imminent. There was a girl in the school, Maggie Forbes, a miracle of sad-humoured patience, a constant sufferer from toothache, who would signal deprecating gestures at the half-boarder provoked to anger, and counsel her to mind what she was about. 'Do as I do—grin and bear it,' she would say, comparing Winny's persecutions to her own pains. But Winny bore a spirit, and thought it servile to crouch to a tyrant. Winny could not crouch.

In the catalogue of her duties apart from study mention had been made by Mrs Brunton of help to be given to the little ones at dressing and undressing, and this was far from being the whole of their claim upon her. Winny washed and combed and curled some three or four, others being taken off her hands by elder girls of motherly type, but she had the clothes to mend and stockings to darn of them all, and a certain exact order to maintain in the drawers where their linen was kept. This last was a simple affair enough except with one handsome, heedless child who disarranged the contents of

hers as often as she had access to it. It was Miss Hubbard's custom to make a tour of the wardrobes thrice a week during Mr Hollingshed's lesson, while all the girls were engaged writing and summing, and it was quite the exception if Miss Winifred did not incur a rebuke for the untidiness of little Myra's drawer. This happened so often that, at last, Winny adopted the expedient of setting little Myra to tidy it herself. Practice soon made the child perfect, but did not, alas! extirpate her root of carelessness; and one memorable afternoon Miss Hubbard descended from the upper story with a bunch of small, unfolded, rumpled garments in her hand, and laying them down before Miss Winifred, bade her be ashamed of her negligence, and go immediately and put Miss Myra's drawer to rights. It was a wet day, and recreation time. Myra heard, and came running to carry off her things, which Winny handed over to her with a weary, reproachful air. She was busy correcting a pile of second-class dictations, and scarcely noticed that Miss Hubbard reiterated her command, until one of the great girls

plucked her by the sleeve, and whispered: 'You had better go, Miss Winifred.'

Winny lifted her head, and asked: 'What!' then looked round, and said to the teacher: 'Myra can put her drawer tidy herself now.'

Miss Hubbard rejoined: 'I told *you* to go—go at once.'

Winny went, and in a minute returned, saying: 'It is done—Myra has done it.'

Miss Hubbard grew red, stood up, and made her last appeal: 'Miss Winifred, do you defy me?'

Winny paused for a scarcely perceptible moment, considering what she meant; and then she walked back to her desk, and went on correcting those dictations. One might have heard a pin drop in the awful silence that ensued. Maggie Forbes groaned for pain of mind and toothache, and the girls, generally, took long looks at Miss Winifred, who had a hunted expression, but evinced no other sign of emotion. Then the dressing-bell rang before dinner, and there was a dispersion, of which Maggie Forbes availed herself to assure Winny

of her sympathy under all consequences, while little Myra came with tears in her big blue eyes to make the useless offering of her penitence. Winny only said: 'Let me alone.' Perhaps she felt that she could not bear any more just then; and nobody was surprised that she did not appear at dinner. She kept on at her ordinary business amongst slates and exercise-books until late in the evening. The great girls talked apart, wondering what would be the end of this novel episode. None of them cared much for Miss Winifred—she was younger than themselves, and unfamiliar—but none of them cared much for Miss Hubbard either. Except Maggie Forbes not any one owned yet to having formed an opinion on what had occurred, and Maggie kept hers to herself, only gasping in a paroxysm of torture: 'She will be ordered to beg pardon, and say she is sorry—but I know what I think.'

And that was the alternative proposed to Winny Hesketh—to beg pardon and say she was sorry—or to be dismissed the school. Miss Hubbard made her complaint—the last of

a tedious series of complaints—and Mrs Brunton called for Miss Winifred to hear her judgment. Witnessed against in her absence, Winny heard it in silence, and went her way—with a week to consider of it. For two days Miss Hubbard, perhaps, enjoyed her triumph, but it could not last. She had not a bad heart, and was probably sorry when it became evident that Miss Winifred was far from penitently inclined. Her submission had been anticipated so much as a matter of course, that the gravity of the other event had not been thought of by anybody but herself. Mrs Brunton watched the case with increasing anxiety, and consulted her favourite girls—girls who twelve months hence might be married women of importance in Cotham. They had not much to say—Miss Winifred was certainly too quick with her tongue, but Miss Hubbard was too exacting, and never could think she had done enough. They would try, however, to persuade Miss Winifred to beg her pardon. Maggie Forbes listened and despaired, sitting on the ground, while Winny was put through this ordeal. She underwent

it stoically, and the result was announced to Mrs Brunton in two words: 'She won't.'

That evening Mrs Brunton went to talk to Mrs Hesketh. The widow heard her story to the end with a pale austere face, and when it was done she said with a slight tremble in her voice: 'Will you tell Winny that her mother will be glad to see her on Saturday?'

Mrs Brunton had hoped that Mrs Hesketh would wish to see her little girl before Saturday —to reason with her, to work on her feelings, or use her authority. She was loath to go with this conclusion; she expressed her regret, represented her difficulty—the necessity of upholding the principle of obedience in a school, the impossibility of suffering an act of defiance to pass with impunity. The widow bowed her head, and did not seem to think further words called for. No doubt, when the schoolmistress had taken her leave, and was gone, she made grievous reflections on the sorrow of children, and the uncertainty how they would turn out. But she did not condemn Winny—given the circumstances, Winny was

doing just what might have been predicated of her.

The intervening days went softly. Miss Hubbard appeared shy of Miss Winifred who went about her business methodically, but with less *verve* than her wont. She had not come much under Mrs Brunton's notice before—only once, when a sort of epidemic cold, attended with aching head and limbs and swollen face, had prevailed in the school, Miss Winifred, the first victim, had kept up and done her work; but Mrs Brunton, the next attacked, had succumbed, and gone to bed, and had wondered aloud in her own anguish at the half-boarder's endurance. She recollected it at this time—she was reminded of it one evening when she met Miss Winifred going down-stairs to the dining-room to practise when the rest of the house was still: 'I am afraid the fire is out, Miss Winifred,' she said. 'Oh, I don't care for the cold,' said Winny, in just the same voice in which she had said on that occasion: 'Oh, I don't care for the pain.' It was already a part of Winny's philosophy that some people had to bear more

cold and more pain than others whether they cared or not, and it was best to bear them without making a fuss.

And so it came to Friday, and Winny mentioned to Eccles, the head housemaid, that she should want her box early in the morning. 'Then you're going, Miss Winifred? You can't knock under? You'll find the proudest spirits *do* have to come down,' said the servant pityingly. For an hour before tea Winny was occupied collecting her own books, and preparing to give up her trusts. Maggie Forbes followed her about with pleading eyes. Somebody scolded little Myra, and she cried. Then one of the great girls—she was only a year older than Winny, but she was very tall and of the highest reputation in the school for ability and goodness, of a beautiful countenance too—came and put her hand round Winny's neck, and laid her cheek against hers, and said how sorry, how very sorry they all were—and could she not, could she not—and here she broke down, sobbing. Winny sat quite still for a minute; eagerly observed, eagerly solicited:

'Oh, do, Miss Winifred, *do*.' Then she looked round from face to face, and releasing herself from the caress, so pathetically strange to her, she said: 'No, I cannot. And think what my life would be'—and she got up, and went out.

Maggie Forbes dropt her head on her desk with a vehement groan, and said: 'I knew she wouldn't!'

CHAPTER VII.

UNDER A CLOUD.

THE Manor School was an old Jacobean mansion of red brick, with round-headed gables and stone dressings, and a luxuriant vine growing over the front. A spacious court-yard secluded it from the street, and when Winny Hesketh left it that Saturday at noon, all the pale November sunshine seemed to have got entangled amongst the yellow leaves of the lime-trees that overtopt the garden wall. As she passed into the street, she passed into the shade. She was alone, and sad enough. She took her way straight to Castle Green, and met her mother in the shop.

'Well, Winny, my dear,' said the widow, and came forward and kissed her. Winny did not speak—could not trust herself to speak. 'There is a good fire in the parlour, and dinner

will be ready at one. Go, and take your bonnet off, and I will come to you presently,' her mother said again, and dismissed her with a nod.

It was not until dusk that they talked of what had happened, Winny sitting in the old rocking-chair, and her mother opposite. It began by Winny asking if there was any news of Dick.

'Yes, there's news—not very good news, I am sorry to say. His uncle complains of his idleness—just as I expected,' said the widow.

'And there's not good news of me either,' Winny added in a low tone.

Her mother spoke out. 'It is a pity, Winny, there is no denying that—whether you are most to blame or somebody else is. It was an advantage, as Mrs Mason and Miss Baxter said, when Mrs Brunton consented to take you; for the very name of having had your education at the Manor School would have been a recommendation to you for your whole life.' And then there was silence.

Later in the evening, when all was quiet on

Castle Green, when curtains were drawn and candles lighted, the widow Hesketh looked in her child's face, and said: 'You are very dark under the eyes, Winny—thin you always were, but you are thinner than ever.' And then, by dint of close questioning, she arrived at a partial knowledge of what her work and her vexations had been. Winny was moderate in her expressions; she was evidently weighed upon by her actual disaster, and in one sense she had begun to feel already that it had come upon her by her own fault. Her mother feared to deject her, but she feared also lest she might encourage her natural self-will. Winny knew her mother was good to her because she was Winny; but the problem of the rights and wrongs of her trial were left for her own conscience to work out. This aspect of it held firm—that she would have scorned herself had she made submission to Miss Hubbard; because such submission would not have arisen out of any sincere conviction that it was due, but out of fear of the threatened penalty. And, in fact, she did not fear it—not on her own

account. Her heart ached with a sort of pitiful remorse when she watched her mother, and divined her distress; but for herself, she felt as if she had escaped from a yoke intolerably galling, and that night she slept by her mother's side as she had not slept for weeks. The widow listened to her soft breathing thankfully, herself kept awake by many anxious thoughts.

In the morning there was a colour in Winny's cheeks, and her eyes had brightened. 'I'm sure, Winny, I don't know what is to be done with you,' said her mother at breakfast.

'I am young, mother, yet,' was Winny's rejoinder, and both her voice and her countenance were cheerful. It appeared that her courage was not abated, and that she would not soon despair of herself.

It was Sunday, and they went to church. Winny had not given up musing in church, and she had something to muse of this morning—What was to be done with her? What!

In the afternoon Miss Baxter called upon

the widow Hesketh—her most constant friend, a lover of Winny too.

'It begins to feel strange when children get beyond guidance, Mrs Hesketh—and Winny of all good children in the world!' was her opening address. 'I never had any children of my own, but I can fancy how it must be with those who have, when they see the poor young creatures daring perils that they have no notion of. Aye, Winny, you may look at me—it's you I'm thinking of! She must go back to the Manor School, Mrs Hesketh.'

Her mother bade Winny run away—she wished to speak with Miss Baxter alone. Then the widow told her child's side of the story.

'It was hard upon her, very hard, but she must learn to endure hardness. She is healthy and strong,' was Miss Baxter's answer.

Mrs Hesketh demurred. 'She is healthy enough, but up early and down late, and fretted besides, tells on a growing girl's strength and temper. If I had known beforehand all that was expected from her, I should have

thought twice before sending her to Mrs Brunton. Winny is not one of the complaining sort, and though she's mine, I can say this for her, that when it comes to a duty that she owns, she would drop before she would be beat. Mrs Brunton was hasty—she spoke without hearing the child in her defence. I know that Winny won't be driven—you may guide her—she'll hear reason. But against what she calls tyranny, she'll set her face like a flint.'

Nevertheless, Miss Baxter adhered to her opinion that Winny must go back to the school. The next day Mrs Mason visited the widow, and was of the same counsel. Mr Anderson also came, and talked long to her mother. Winny was sent out of the room again, but before the music-master left she was called to hear what he had to say.

'Miss Winifred, this is a troublesome business—I wish you were well through it,' he began. 'I have known you since you were quite young, and I wish very much you were well through it.'

Winny blushed, surprised. It was not long since Mr Anderson was young himself—even if he were not young yet. He went on: 'It was a mere straw that broke your patience at last—I wonder at you, Miss Winifred! But there was never any love lost between you and Miss Hubbard.'

'I did nothing wilfully to provoke her. She tried to wear me out,' said Winny.

'Where you feel a contempt, Miss Winifred, you make it felt—without a word spoken you make it felt.' Winny looked down. 'Just with a curl of the lip and a glance of the eye, you can avenge yourself—and the person you despised has been able to bring you to this disgrace!'

Winny caught her breath. All the colour went out of her face, and her dilated eyes filled with tears. 'I don't care for disgrace—if it be disgrace! Mother, are you ashamed of me?' cried she.

'No, Winny—I am grieved, deeply grieved.'

'Miss Winifred, what I tell you is true—it is a disgrace to be dismissed from the Manor

School. I have reason to believe that Mrs Brunton will relent yet, if you will promise to keep a guard upon your little sarcastic mouth for the time to come.' Mr Anderson was very earnest in his appeal; his words were severe, but his intentions were kind. And he had been just as urgent on the other side.

Winny was so long in answering that her mother spoke: 'What do you say, Winny?'

'What do *you* say, mother?' the child asked with a tremulous, pale smile.

'I say that you must answer for yourself. The disgrace is nothing that cannot be lived down.'

'Then I will live it down,' was Winny's almost inaudible conclusion.

The music-master had pleaded in vain. He took his leave, shaking hands with his pupil, and saying to her mother that he would give her a lesson twice a week—in the evening if it was convenient. 'And you must practise for me more than you have done lately,' said he, going out.

The widow Hesketh knew that it was

finished, and told any friend who desired to re-open the subject with Winny that it had better be let alone for the present.

A complete account of Winny's disaster was written to her Aunt Agnes by her mother, and in course of post came a letter of condolence from her, and a message from Uncle Hayland to Winny, advising her to study the French fable of, 'Le chêne et le roseau.' Winny knew it by heart, moral and all, but she failed to perceive its application to her own case.

There was no suggestion for the future in Aunt Agnes's letter, and the dark days of winter came on. The widow used to talk to her child as they sat by the fireside, and to ask her what she thought. But Winny was so ignorant of the world—she did not know what to think. There were the Christmas bills to make out: the widow would not allow any one to make them out but herself, but Winny could call over the long rows of figures for her, to be sure that they tallied with the figures in the book. In carrying out this process, Winny

discovered the imperfection of her mother's scholarship in words almost comically mis-spelt. It was a shock to her, but her second thoughts were all tenderness. She would not have told her discovery, or have insinuated a single correction. Her mother's customers must long since have become used to her spelling, and her accounts being just, what did it matter? Thus Winny reasoned. Apart from her spelling, she regarded her mother as the wisest and cleverest of women.

Then Miss Baxter, notwithstanding that her advice had been neglected, was good to the child. She invited her to tea every week, and Winny took her thimble, and went gladly. The drawing-room over the chemist's shop looked down on the busiest thoroughfare in Cotham. It was a ricketty old house, full of old furniture and old pictures, all faded and smoky; and in one window stood permanently an embroidery-frame that was never without its piece of work and brilliant skeins of silk. Miss Baxter was a famous embroideress, and had her patterns from France. Great ladies paid her great

prices for her fine table-covers of cloth and velvet, wreathed with flowers. She and her sister had succeeded to their father's old-established business, and had kept it on, with the assistance of a former apprentice, promoted to a very small partnership. Miss Baxter was the woman of the house; her sister, Miss Maria, an expert in Latin and drugs, was the man. Miss Maria had a tart temper, but she reserved its tartness for the shop, and was always good-humoured upstairs. Winny Hesketh was a favourite there. She had not skill to help at the rich and rare embroidery, but she could ply her needle in other ways, and be very useful to the two old maiden ladies. Winny thought them old, but they were probably not much over forty at this date, for they never grew any older than they seemed then.

Being under a cloud, Winny was grateful for any countenance that was vouchsafed her, and listened meekly to the good words of caution and counsel that were distilled into her ears during these visits. The question, What was to be done with her? grew pressing. Was

the intention of affording her a superior education to be dropt? She had some serviceable qualities—qualities that would avail her in whatever way she might seek her subsistence. The fashion of embroidery was going out, or she might have learnt to embroider. Her mother had been a successful milliner—Winny was not yet too old to be apprenticed to Decker & Trym's. Miss Maria Baxter professed that she would infinitely rather be a milliner in her own shop than be a governess in anybody's house—give *her* independence!

Winny could appreciate the joy of independence, and she knew the chafe of thraldom, but painful blushes dyed her cheeks when she contemplated the possibility of being condemned for life to the monotony of stitch, stitch, stitch. Yet she would not at this crisis have refused obedience to any declared wish of her mother. Her strength was exhausted in that one effort of resistance to Miss Hubbard, and to whatever form of servitude she had been consigned next, she would have taken up her task without objection, as the lot to which by her own

deliberate act and deed, she had reduced herself.

The widow Hesketh watched her child with more perplexity than Winny could have any idea of. She knew that it would be almost cruel to bind her to manual toil—she was better worth than tying bows, Mrs Fleetwood said. Winny, humbled by the distress she was the occasion of, began to give in to the belief that she deserved her fate, but this friend, who was apt to take other views than the majority, forbade it.

'Never put a whip into your enemy's hand, by admitting that to be your fault which is not your fault,' she said. 'It was a slavish obedience that was required of you, and I, for one, commend the spirit that would not yield it. Where are you going to send Winny now, Mrs Hesketh?' The widow gazed at her child very wistfully, and said that they had not come to a decision. Mrs Fleetwood glanced from the one to the other, and gave her tribute of advice: 'Don't throw her away—but I need not say that—Winny will not allow herself to be thrown

away. She is all imagination; afford her sufficient learning to nourish it, and we shall be proud of her some day.'

Mrs Hesketh shook her head: 'I shall be satisfied with less than that, Mrs Fleetwood.'

The visitor rose with an impetuous gesture. 'Kiss me, Winny, and keep up your heart. I must go, or it will be dark before I get home. My word for it, you have been more sinned against than sinning. Don't fret, child—a little longer patience, and the clouds must part.'

When Mrs Fleetwood was gone Winny brought out her books. 'It is of no use dwelling on it, and being miserable, mother,' said she.

'No, Winny,' responded the widow with a regretful sigh. 'What is done cannot be undone. As you have begun you will have to go on—doing and deciding for yourself, and braving the consequences of what you do.'

CHAPTER VIII.

BETWEEN THE SHOWERS.

THE clouds did part, and soon, and in an unexpected quarter. The New Year's parcel from Aunt Agnes came in due time, and the letter announcing it brought a proposal that Winny should be sent to London—her cousin Lucy was going over to France with her governess, Madame Bouvier, to live for six months at Avranches, in the house of Madame's father, a physician, for the sake of a change that it was hoped might be beneficial to her health, and if Winny's mother did not object to the expense, Madame Bouvier would take charge of her also, and the cousins might pursue their studies together. It was added that Winny would, at the end of six months, be older, wiser, and better able to cope with

her work, if it seemed desirable for her to return to the Manor School.

Winny coloured with pleasure at the first part of the letter. With regard to the latter clause, her mother said: 'We will not look forward.' There was not a moment's hesitation about accepting for her the proposal that she should go to France.

Naturally Winny thought of London first, of seeing Dick and Lucy, and the great, unknown city. She did not need urging to be diligent with her needle now; she desired more things than her mother considered necessary, and did not object to sit all day long helping Miss Dalby, the little humpbacked dressmaker who came to sew. 'You must think I am made of money,' was the widow's expostulation against some of her many wishes. Nevertheless, she gave her everything she asked for, and Winny was glad, and not at all ashamed of wanting so much at once. That she was sorry to leave her mother, or that her mother was sorry to part with her, there were no signs at all. Mrs Hesketh said that she trusted it would be for

her child's good, and so that she did well, it was enough for her. As for Winny—girls are very ungrateful. They never seem to come to a sense of what they owe their mothers until they are mothers themselves.

So Winny Hesketh went to London, by coach and by railway, through the country covered with snow, and was met by her Uncle Hayland and Dick at the other end of the journey. Her Aunt Agnes and her cousin Lucy gave her a warm welcome, and her cousin Herbert, who was Dick's age, was very good-natured. Ellen was a little girl of ten, a pet yet, a pretty child who was dispatched to bed as soon as she had kissed her cousin Winny. Mr Hayland lived in Welbeck Street, in a venerable house, rather confined as regarded air, but otherwise handsome and comfortable. In a day or two Winny felt at home there. Her Aunt Agnes was hospitable and kind. Her Uncle Hayland generally went into the city after breakfast, accompanied by Herbert and Dick, but sometimes the boys went alone, and he took Winny to see some

lion of London such as country cousins must needs be shown. Winny had been a week or more in Welbeck Street before any word was said to her of the circumstances that had led to her coming to town; but one day (it was Sunday afternoon, and the occasion was probably prepared) she found herself left in the drawing-room alone with her Uncle, who was seated at the window furthest from the fire, with the Family Bible before him. Winny by the hearth had a good book on her lap, but she was not reading it—she was feeling the time long, and wondering where Dick was. She looked up, and met her Uncle's eyes resting on her. He had taken off his gold spectacles, and laid them on the open page.

He began to speak of the many troubles her mother had had—of her losses in money and friends, of the loss of Winny's father, and of the hope she had cherished that she would have comfort in her children. 'You are not going to disappoint her, Winny?' he said; and Winny was moved. He came and stood over against her, and told her the story of that evan-

gelical man, John Bradford, who, meeting a criminal on his way to execution, said: 'There, but for the grace of God, goes John Bradford!' and he adjured her to seek that grace of God, that the depravity of her heart might not defeat her mother's endeavours, and bring her to greater grief.

Winny did not like to hear of the depravity of her heart out of church—there it signified much the same as confessing herself a miserable sinner; and she knew that if she had called herself a miserable sinner to Dick, he would have said she was making fun or telling a story. But her Uncle Hayland laid stress on this depravity as an absolute and existent fact, and when he had probed her conscience a little deeper, Winny began to recollect what violent and wicked thoughts had often traversed her mind when she was angry, and how she had not been far from hating Miss Hubbard—'But she made me hate her,' said she, still on the defensive.

'She did not put the evil spirit of hatred into your heart, my dear Winny, she only

showed you that it was there. The unconverted heart is the abode of all Satan's brood.' It is probable that Uncle Hayland caught a glimpse of some laughing imp in Winny's bright eyes at this instant, for he stopped, stroked her hair, and went back to his Bible.

Mr Hayland's religion happily admitted of much tenderness to sinners such as she was, and the six weeks she spent in Welbeck Street were a bright interlude in her young life. She seemed a new creature in these new circumstances; she developed a playful, innocent vivacity, and an elastic power of enjoyment. The effect of kindness on her was like the effect of sunshine on a plant that is lifted out of a cold north shade. Her uncle might and did sigh over her unregenerate mind, but he called her capital company; and though her Aunt Agnes denounced her as too stiff in certain opinions and prejudices, she confessed that there was something real in her to work upon, and since her mother was utterly resolved that she must be a self-helpful and self-dependent woman, it was, perhaps, a good thing that

she possessed a moral back-bone of more than common firmness. Oh, that Dick were more like her in this respect, was both uncle and aunt's conclusion.

Winny Hesketh had not come yet to the years when it is an ascertained fact of experience that pleasant opportunities do not often recur, nor happy days repeat themselves. But she took advantage of existing chances as if she had the bitter fruit of knowledge to teach her not to delay, lest delay should prove to be loss. Her cousin Lucy said of her that she was the most cheerful and least hopeful soul she knew, and she was a puzzle to her. Perhaps Winny was a puzzle to herself, but she did not fall into morbid reflection thereupon. She only quoted that scripture which bids us not boast of the morrow since we know not what a day may bring forth. And if she were required to vote for any amusement, whether it should be *now* or *then*, her voice was invariably for *now*. This was so marked as to be a trait of character in her already.

Then her sentiment of what was actually amusing to her was strong. She did not limply yield herself to be dragged hither and thither under the pretence of entertainment, if she did not like the entertainment. She chose her pleasures with a discriminating taste—her taste might alter, might grow more cultivated, but at this date it was for and against such and such things, and she did not want courage to assert it. Lucy warned her to take care that this decision in preferences did not turn into a blindness to the wishes and rights of others.

'Tell me, Lucy, when I set my own whim selfishly first where others are concerned,' said Winny quietly.

Lucy, become more accurately observant, discovered that Winny could forego a treat with as lively a good humour as she could enjoy it. This was the time of Christmas parties, and more than once or twice there were invitations out which did not include the little country-cousin. But Winny watched Lucy and her sister being made smart without one manifest longing on her own behalf, and would

lie awake to hear Lucy's prattle when she came home, and sit up shivering in her night-cap as merry as if she had shared the fun—a true goodness on her part which amazed her cousins.

It was when the treat was for her especially provided that she was independent in her use of it. Her Aunt Agnes proposed to convoy her to the Zoological Gardens. Winny stated that she should like that much, if her aunt would promise not to betray her into the presence of the monkeys or the snakes.

'My dear Winny, the monkeys are the most diverting part of the collection, and the snakes, as you call them, are beautiful!'

'The picture of a serpent makes me shudder, and I have seen a poor monkey—it was too pathetically human.'

She was not further urged. She was allowed to be pleased with the female elephant and her sucking child, and to admire seven young leopards at play; and also to be sorry for the caged lions. The spectacle of a gorgeous peacock spreading his tail on a dust heap

evoked her satire. And of another tall bird, a rich plumaged bird, who lifted his legs measuredly, and turned his head as if enacting a pompous part to slow music, she said that Nature must have made him in a freak to let mortals see the caricature of their high-stepping, secret pride. Aunt Agnes thought the comparison clever, and that it would have done very well in a Subject.

Mr Hayland's favourite place of instruction for youthful visitors was the British Museum, and here again Winny selected her own diversion, chiefly in the manuscript-room. Geology and the insect creation Uncle Hayland considered more eternally profitable, but he could not entice Winny away from the glazed desks, where she could read a letter of Queen Elizabeth, and see what a pope's bull looked like, and make her reflections on the handwriting of men and women famous and infamous in the pages of Goldsmith—for Goldsmith had not come to be despised as an historical authority for the young yet, and Winny's memory was stored with his pictures. Amongst the tombs in Westminster

Abbey she had another delightful morning, and at the Tower she was mightily gratified, but of all the sights of London she gave her preference to the London streets.

Her uncle was very indulgent to her vagrant propensities. He took her into the city, and let her into the mystery of secluded courts, where plane-trees grew and ancient families of mercantile renown still kept their old-world state, a pattern to a feverish generation. He took her up the river and down the river on sunshiny morning steamboats, and showed her Lambeth Palace and the Lollards' Tower, and Fulham, and Chelsea old church for Sir Thomas More's sake, and the grim Water-gate at the Tower, and the Temple Gardens and Northumberland House, and she peopled them all out of Shakespeare or Goldsmith. And then he showed her London Bridge at noon, and Smithfield out of the beautiful stair-case window of a house where they lunched with an aged lady in a room hung with stamped leather tapestry; and he showed her the crossing opposite the Bank of England at four

o'clock, and brought her home through Oxford Street by gaslight. Then Aunt Agnes interposing, said that was enough, and her uncle promised that when next she came to London, if it were summer, she should go to Hampton Court and Windsor Castle, where so much history had been transacted in good times and bad.

Altogether this visit was a success, and of infinite benefit to Winny. It opened the eyes of her understanding, and warmed the cold corners of her heart. This was truly the happiest Christmas of her childhood. At that season the rigour of her uncle's piety was relaxed in favour of a carpet dance for the young people, at which Madame Bouvier played the piano. Winny skipped about with agility, and she never wanted a partner. One of them was acquainted with Mr Caleb and Mrs Fleetwood at Cotham, and had heard of Winny as the little girl who said she wouldn't, and she didn't care—he was a painter himself, and very humorous. He mimicked Winny's country-steps, which cleared the floor much oftener than the steps that were the fashion in town, and

when Winny retaliated by mimicking his drawling feet they became excellent friends.

Winny and her Cousin Lucy spent an afternoon at that painter's house. Lucy was going to be bridesmaid to his daughter, and while they two were deep in confidential chat over *chiffons*, the painter appeared, and found Winny without amusement. He proposed that she should go into his studio, and seek it there. Winny went, and was talked to agreeably until another painter appeared, and then another, to whom she was introduced as 'A bit of Northshire.' She would have wished to retire to the drawing-room then, but the last comer cried out that she was a new face, and would just do for his country-girl, counting her chickens before they were hatched. And being appealed to whether she minded, and not minding, but only blushing a trifle, she was made a model of with a basket on her arm, supposed to contain those famous eggs that never came to anything, and sketched twice over—one sketch being presented to her as the reward of patience, and the other carried

off to serve as a study for the picture. Aunt Agnes told her when she went home that she might esteem herself highly flattered by such notice, and Winny was pleased.

'Mr Barton says that Cousin Winny's eyes will do some mischief by and by,' Lucy innocently communicated.

'Pshaw!' ejaculated Aunt Agnes, with a sense of duty for the repression of vanity. 'Mr Barton ought to know better than to talk nonsense to girls. Don't let silly notions get into your head, Winny, or they will make you affected, and spoil the little good looks you have. You are not nearly so pretty as your mother was, I can tell you.'

Winny was blithely indifferent—she had never fancied herself pretty at all. Nevertheless, a lingering, faint complacency was the result of Aunt Agnes's admonition. One would rather be agreeable to look at than otherwise, and it was a sensible relief to discover that her ugliness was being ameliorated.

The best of times must have an end, and

the day came at last when Madame Bouvier carried the two girls away to France, Lucy in tears, Winny in cheerful philosophic humour. It was a healthy little life they lived at Avranches, and if it did not permanently improve Lucy's strength, it did much in every way for Winny. She delighted in the foreign town, its manners, customs and costumes, its neighbourhood and scenery. Nothing was a hardship to her there, nothing a difficulty—not her needle even, with which she learnt to graft a silk stocking, and to embroider exquisite fine muslin work with a variety of stitches. She embroidered a beautiful muslin collar for her mother, and was a complete personification of useful industry. In that household reason ruled and prevailed. Madame Bouvier began by suspecting in her a temper of revolt and indocility, but Winny was quite the reverse of indocile here—so intelligent, easy-going, and unselfish, that she won a character for more than common ability and goodness, and Madame Bouvier stated in a letter to her Aunt Agnes, which was forwarded to Cotham, that she should

regard herself as very fortunate, indeed, if she never met with a worse pupil.

The six months passed but too quickly. Mr Hayland could not spare his dear Lucy any longer, and she was to come home with Madame Bouvier; but there was a debate whether Winny should be placed under other care, and left still at Avranches, or whether she should go home with them. Mrs Brunton, on Madame's flattering report, had again expressed her willingness to give her another trial, and Winny was not permitted to doubt that her mother and all her friends at Cotham were of opinion that it would be for her true interests to make the concession that was required of her, and to go back to the Manor School. That a boy should be obstinate in rebellion was not strange, they told her, but that a girl should hold out against a host of advisers was a thing unheard-of. Winny temporised, and gave way. She had never forgotten her uncle's exposition of the depravity of her heart, and with some confusion of ideas, she made the concession and returned to England.

CHAPTER IX.

VARIABLE WEATHER.

THERE was a change in the house on Castle-Green when Winny Hesketh saw it again. The legend in the window had disappeared, and the shop was become once more a parlour. Her mother sat there making up a clean net cap. Winny had not been warned of the change, but a few words explained it to her. The business was given up because the widow began to find it falling off, and did not feel herself any longer equal to the struggle of competition; and with Dick provided for, and an end in view of the expenses of Winny's education, she had enough laid by to live on, while giving up the drawing-room floor of her house to a lodger. Mr Andrews was still there, unseen and unheard, the most unobtrusive and taciturn of elderly gentlemen.

The Manor School had re-assembled after the midsummer holidays when Winny Hesketh went back. Mrs Brunton welcomed her with matter-of-fact encouragement, Miss Hubbard met her with a blush. There had been a great exodus of elder girls at the last breaking-up, but the younger ones who had known her came round her like bees, kissing her, and making much of her. Maggie Forbes, temporarily free from toothache, was the only one who offered an admonition. 'Now, Miss Winifred, you know what you have to expect, so *do* be cautious'—a warning that put into words numerous doubts and fears that had haunted Winny's mind in a shadowy way from the moment she began to contemplate the resumption of her bondage. Then that great girl who had sobbed over her when she left—Miss Mildred Hutton—came and tucked her under her arm in a protective fashion, and informed her that they were to be bed-fellows —apparently it was meant to keep Miss Winifred straight now by being indulgent to her.

The next day she stepped into her groove.

She found some of the duties that had been assigned to her before committed now to Eccles, and others Miss Hubbard was taxed with—but these soon again devolved on the half-boarder. During the past half year there had been in her room two successive incompetents who neither would nor could satisfy the requirements of her place, and Maggie Forbes tried to impress it upon Winny that if she only exercised a judicious regard for her own rights, and smoothed the curl out of her lip, she would get on with Miss Hubbard now, their incompatibility of temper notwithstanding; for her value as an uncomplaining, laborious girl had been appreciated in her absence, and even quoted.

Winny began with good intentions, and hoped the best of herself. There might be a little growth of grace in her, but assuredly there was no miraculous conversion. Her life was soon again a warfare with Miss Hubbard, though it was no longer a warfare without allies. Miss Hutton was already her friend, and in a little while she had another, still more

powerful. This was Miss Georgiana Denham, called 'Georgie' by her intimates; a girl who had entered the school at midsummer, and had straightway taken her place high in the first class. She was of Miss Hutton's age, and her rival—with an amicable rivalry.

Winny's many cares kept her much apart from her school-fellows in their hours of idleness, and she had little knowledge of Miss Denham, until a certain evening in the garden when she ran a thorn into her hand, and somebody called for Georgie to perform the operation of extracting it. Georgie produced a pair of tweezers, took firm hold of the suffering member, and drew out the thorn. Winny looked at her wound first, then at her physician, who was looking at her with some amusement. The next day Miss Denham invited Miss Winifred to walk with her, and they found twenty things to talk about, concerning which they had sentiments in common. Another day, when Winny was going immediately after dinner to apply herself to the correction of juvenile exercises, she found that they had

been removed from her desk and done, and Georgie summoned her to enjoy the twenty minutes of desultory chat which was an institution in favour of the complexions of the girls who were not half-boarders. Winny could not yield herself at once to such a dereliction of duty, but Georgie was imperative, and when Miss Hubbard descended to the schoolroom from brief repose in her own sanctum, she could hardly contain her indignant surprise at the sight of Miss Winifred sitting in the window seat, doing nothing but chatter. She made a note of it, and watched to prevent a repetition of the offence. But it was very difficult to prevent a blameless pleasure that Miss Denham's mind was set on. That young lady had a suave manner, and a temper that could not be provoked. She had taken a fancy for Miss Winifred's company, and gave her help under the rose that she might have it. Winny was nothing loth—the attraction was mutual. She was one of the three clever girls of the school, and it was irksome to her to walk for an hour and a half with rich Miss Cradock,

who was older than herself, but who was reputed not to have two ideas to rub together; or with pretty Miss Otley, who never speculated upon anything except what she should wear when she was married—a topic on which Winny did not feel, nor desire to feel, any interest. Thus it came to pass that the second chapter of her life at the Manor School was tolerable—more than tolerable; for though her work increased rather than diminished, there was the sustaining joy of friendship in the background of which she could not be deprived.

These days when Winny Hesketh was training for a governess were the days before competitive examinations, and she was cut short in many studies which she would have been urged to persevere in had she been under training now. When Mr Hollingshed saw her back, he shoved aside somebody else's slate and copy-book, to make room for hers in her old place next to him, but Miss Winifred told him, laughing, she could write and sum well enough—so Mrs Brunton said. She was curtailed next of those vexatious repetition lessons,

and of English dictation—English reading was from the first pronounced not requisite for her. In fact, her time was wanted for other purposes. She had brought home from France developed capabilities of which all the teachers availed themselves more or less for the easing of their own burdens. She was at everybody's beck and call, and the working-hours of the day were swallowed up to the very crumbs. The last thing to go was what Winny most delighted in —the 'Subject.' Other girls seized on her old manuscript-books as a possession, and it was a bitter moment when Mrs Brunton laid down her last, and turning to Miss Hubbard said: 'It is unnecessary for Miss Winifred to exercise herself any longer in composition; she may give it up, and a little more of her time will be set free for something else.' Poor Winny was accustomed to ruminate her Subject, walking with a silent girl by choice, and to write it before the house was awake, so that there was small profit in her deprivation. The only event that happened was that now the reading aloud of the other girls' Subjects was laid upon her—

two-and-twenty of them—and oh, the life they led her because of her reading!

The ceremonial took place every third Tuesday night in the dining-room, and if any of the Manor girls have since betaken themselves to literature they cannot have suffered more from the asperity of critics than the sensitive ones suffered then from the apprehension of criticism. Even Miss Denham was nervous, and kept her eyes concentrated on her glove mending. When Miss Winifred was promoted to reading the Subjects, there was a girl recently entered into the first class who had a gift of composition, and, from long practice in a lower form, considerable skill—Miss Patrick, a jerky, absent girl, whose hair was put up like a hastily-constructed bird's nest, but who was quite justified by her natural abilities in disputing the chief prizes with Miss Hutton and Miss Denham.

Miss Patrick ardently aspired to win the Subject prize, most coveted distinction of all, but her hand being difficult to decipher, Miss Winifred occasionally stumbled at a word,

and the effects of a well-turned sentence was marred. Miss Patrick besought her, therefore, that she would read over her Subject privately, and Winny, for justice' sake, consented. Then another girl, and another, and another, put in the same plea for the same precaution on their behalf, to all of whom Winny, in self-defence, said, No—except to Miss Nina Mostyn, the beauty of the school, a young lady of whom the old dancing-master enthusiastically averred that she had but to put out her foot, and she was grace itself to look upon. To Miss Nina Mostyn it was hard to say, No. Miss Denham was devoted to her—everybody was devoted to her in a greater or less degree. She had no parents. There was some mystery about her origin. Her talents were not conspicuous, her pride was intense, and her temper exacting, but she possessed that inexplicable magic which fascinates both sexes alike into a worshipful admiration. Miss Winifred did her behests, and they were neither few nor infrequent, with a mild humour equally free from sarcasm and remonstrance. She allowed Miss Nina to impose upon her as

if she liked it. But necessity compelled that this privilege should be kept exclusive.

Miss Patrick did not win the Subject prize that half-year—there was time enough yet for her to win Subject prizes, young as she was, and only just promoted to the first class. It was well that her over-weening emulation should have a check. Mrs Brunton had a judicious satisfaction in sending her clever girls home when they left the Manor School with this finest feather in their caps. Miss Hutton was leaving next Easter, and would not compete for it again. Maggie Forbes and pretty Miss Otley were also leaving; but they had no pretensions, and Miss Hutton therefore carried away the prize.

It was a grief to Winny Hesketh to anticipate Mildred Hutton's departure, although she had now Miss Denham for a friend, and Mildred shared it. Her principal trait was a sweet lovingness—that was the charm Winny felt in her. She was talented, but so was Miss Patrick. Mildred was good. She had a beneficent influence. Winny was very happy in that even-

ing hour of recreation when Mildred put her arm round her, and they walked up and down the long school room talking confidences. Mildred wrote poetry, tender, religious. She had a plan that some day Winny and she would write a book; Winny doing the practical part of the business, the fun and satire, and she infusing the sentiment and pathos—it was a delightful project.

'O Miss Hutton, Miss Winifred, do sit down! you make me dizzy,' Miss Hubbard would presently cry; then they would find a dusk corner beyond the circle of the lamp-light, and sit down, and go on inventing their plot. Or sometimes Miss Denham would join them with Nina Mostyn, and Mildred and Georgie would sing a duet—they had both most beautiful voices.

Winny remembered these times afterwards as times of exceeding comfort, like those Sunday evenings long ago, when her Cousin Lucy played her spiritual songs without words on Mrs Mason's second-best piano.

Pretty Miss Otley did not return after the

Christmas holidays,—the first news when the school met again was that she was to be married the next week to a wonderfully clever young doctor who was taking up Dr Archer's practice in Cotham. It was an excellent match, and not so hasty as it appeared—their respective families had settled it a year since. Miss Patrick objected that the young lady was very stupid—she could not even spell. Miss Denham rejoined that spelling did not matter—she was nearly nineteen, and wore her tucker charmingly. Mrs Brunton observed on her return from the wedding-breakfast that it was the proudest day of her life, and the bride looked as lovely as it was possible for bride to do, clothed in white satin and swan's down, on a frosty January morning. The bridegroom was tall, and had made an effective figure at church —he allowed his beard to grow in the modern fashion, and it gave him an air of almost military distinction. Perhaps it was a little discouragement to the clever girls to witness the social success of their late companion who had enjoyed a reputation for dulness second to none. How-

ever, there was a half-holiday, a gala-tea with a sumptuous cake sent by the bride's father, and a dance in the evening, so everybody was ultimately satisfied.

The talk round the fire amongst the elder girls at curling-hair time turned on marriage, as was not unnatural. The Manor girls, as a rule, did marry, and soon — and not seldom, each other's brothers. Mildred Hutton heard all, and said nothing. Miss Cradock was the chief speaker. Miss Denham gazed abstractedly into the fire. Nina Mostyn stated that a gipsy had once told her fortune—she was born to be a princess; therefore she must marry a prince, of course, and she would have her wedding in September, when she could wear a crown of myrtle, cut from the bush in blossom. Nina had infinite taste in the wearing of floral adornments. A rose in her hair was a rose in glory. 'And what shall you wear, Georgie?' she asked, bending, to look in her friend's face.

'Rue,' was Miss Denham's laconic answer.

Everybody laughed, and then Miss Cradock, growing venturesome, exclaimed: 'I guess who

will be married first of us!—either Mildred Hutton will, or else Miss Winifred.'

Mildred blushed softly, and smiled, but still held her peace. Winny looked up with her lip in full curl, but did not condescend to a rejoinder. Miss Cradock wagged her head with sly significance. She was felt to be impertinent. She would not have done that had not her curious imagination led her to select a lover for each of the two young ladies she had named. Miss Denham remarked that there were persons who never knew when to be silent—the fire was getting low, and perhaps, they might as well all go to bed.

After Easter there was a vacuum in the school. Mildred Hutton was gone; so was Maggie Forbes, and Miss Nina Mostyn had been unexpectedly called for, and sent to Paris to finish her education.

The serious rivalry of the elder class was now reduced to Miss Denham and Miss Patrick. Miss Denham and Miss Winifred were 'for ever together,' as Miss Hubbard largely expressed it. They would have been wiser had

they chosen each a second comrade. A whisper was circulating for weeks before they heard it, to the effect that Miss Winifred helped Miss Denham, and 'gave her ideas' for her Subjects —and that was the reason why she was always put down first, and why Mrs Brunton commended her composition so highly. Miss Hubbard listened, and was inclined to believe, though she had never known either of the two accused guilty of a mean action. Mrs Brunton was informed, and negatived the supposition by a decisive shake of the head. Nevertheless, she mentioned it—which was a pity—and mentioned it publicly on the occasion of the next reading, when she took the Subjects of Miss Denham and Miss Patrick again into her own hands. Miss Denham's was pronounced the best. Mrs Brunton entered it as such in the class-book, and laying down her pen, looked across the table at the inseparable friends, sitting side by side as usual, and said: 'I trust, Miss Georgiana, that it is all your own—that you are not in the practice of receiving help from Miss Winifred?'

Miss Georgiana reddened to her finger tips. She just said: 'No, ma'am,' and her eyes reverted to her glove-needle. Miss Winifred said nothing, but her countenance was expressive of that keen contempt which her music-master had once told her she could make felt without a word spoken.

Mrs Brunton was satisfied. But amongst the immature heads more protestation on the part of Miss Denham would have been more conclusive. As for Miss Winifred, she never did protest. If she had been accused of robbing a church, she would probably have lifted her eyebrows and have said, 'Oh, indeed?'—she was called too proud to defend herself. But Miss Denham loved approbation; it was as the breath of her nostrils, she could accomplish nothing successfully without it. And this was a most humiliating query that Mrs Brunton had put to her—'whether she was in the practice of receiving help from Miss Winifred?'

Georgie had a streak of genius. She could do what Winny could not. Winny had discovered and acknowledged this, and her

ungrudging appreciation of Georgie's mental power was the permanent ground of their friendship. Winny could work steadily and take long pains, but Georgie in one spurt of inspiration could do more, and better than she. Between themselves this was tacitly agreed upon, but the majority of their companions were to be excused if they did not see it, while they were witnesses to Miss Denham's severe course of study, and to Miss Winifred's almost total emancipation from the pains of learning.

When the reading of the Subjects was over there was still half-an-hour before tea-time. It was a delicious evening at the end of August, and Miss Hubbard gave everybody leave to go into the garden. It was a picturesque old garden, with shady trees upon the grass, and a peep of the river from the upper walk. Georgie went quickly out, and she did not call for Winny—she joined herself to Miss Clare, who had succeeded to Nina Mostyn's rôle of beauty; but she was an ordinary beauty of the apple-faced, round-eyed type, very wholesome, but quite destitute of charm. Winny saw them,

and took her basket and scissors to snip off dead roses in the enclosed parterres before the window of Mrs Brunton's private parlour—a soothing occupation to which she devoted herself when she wished to escape from indifferent company. But to-night she did not enjoy her aloneness. She was hurt and perplexed and abashed. Miss Cradock said to her: 'Georgie is affronted'—but Winny was not inclined to discuss Georgie with Miss Cradock. The tea-bell rang, and the girls trooped indoors.

It was quite possible, without any quarrel or declaration of war, for the two friends to stand aloof. Winny was undemonstrative. She waited for Georgie's invitation to walk and talk with her—she was the receptive one, and claimed nothing. When she had not been claimed herself for an entire week, she ceased to expect anything. Miss Patrick took notice of their silent alienation, and asked Miss Winifred what it meant.

'It means that Miss Denham has been insulted, and will give you no more cause for suspicion,' said Miss Winifred.

'But you might have helped her—it would not have been fair to me, but you *might*, you know. You help everybody that asks you.'

'Miss Denham is not everybody,' said Winny, and would say no more.

Georgie's next Subject was not the best. Miss Patrick took the good mark. And she took it again in October, which made the rivals even, and Georgie announced that she did not care whether she won the prize or not. It was an annual prize given at Christmas. Three more Subjects were to come before the breaking up. There was no question now whether Miss Denham had help of Miss Winifred or not; they were as conspicuous by their distance as they had been formerly by their propinquity.

Once—twice—Georgie made an advance towards a renewal of love. Winny was going tiredly upstairs with a heavy music-folio under her arm. Georgie coming behind with two steps at a time, overtook her, threw her arm round her neck, and gave her a kiss. Winny was passive, except that the little colour she had vanished. The second time was in the

schoolroom towards dusk — Georgie had nothing to do. Winny had a prodigious pile of dictations to go over. She was about to lift them from Miss Hubbard's table to a table nearer the window, when Georgie rushed across the room, and carried them for her. Georgie was as big and strong again as Winny, and when they were friends she watched to pay her these amiable attentions. Winny followed the slates, and thanked her, but when Georgie produced a slate-pencil, and laid a hand on one of the dictations with a view to correct it, Winny looked up and said quietly: 'I have plenty of time to correct them all myself.' Georgie snatched away her hand as if the slate burnt her, and with a flush all over her face went off to Miss Clare. Winny knew that she had thrown away an opportunity of reconciliation; and Miss Cradock wondered whether Miss Denham stood in awe of Miss Winifred.

There was a little girl of good family lately come to the school, who gave herself airs on her breeding. She was beholden for many kind offices to Miss Winifred, for which she

gave her no thanks, using them as her right, and marking her sense of the half-boarder's position by requiring them with a certain impatience of tone if they were not offered; and one day she was so ill-advised as to give Miss Winifred a rough answer when told that she must wait. Winny said nothing, but a minute or two after she had to leave the school-room, and then Miss Denham, who had been observant of the scene, said to the new young lady: 'It is not the custom of this place to be insolent. If you wish Miss Winifred to help you, I advise you to go to her, and tell her you are sorry that you were so rude.' The little girl was quite sure she should not. Miss Patrick promised her that she would soon find her level; and the next day when Miss Winifred was about to hear the child practise her music-lesson, Mrs Brunton interposed, and said: 'That young lady must dispense with your services, Miss Winifred, since she does not thank you for them.' And that word was final. Winnie was told, of course, how Georgie had stood up for her, but it made no difference

in their behaviour to each other. They had fallen into a habit of proud mutual avoidance.

As the winter weather encroached on the fine days of autumn, the pleasant saunterings in the garden were exchanged for brisk parades along the river, and up and down the Holworth Road. When the fallen leaves lay thick on the dank garden-paths, and whirled in heaps about the court-yard, November was come, and Christmas was not far off. There was no Mildred Hutton to make sweet the evening hour of recreation for Winny now, and she took refuge in her work. She was never to be seen hanging about in idle vacuity. Georgie would stare at her sometimes for ever so long, and ever so drearily. It was quite true that she had given up caring whether she won that Subject prize or not, and being delivered from over-anxiety she did win it—that is, she was made sure of it by taking the first place on the two next ensuing occasions. Miss Patrick accepted her defeat with more than average philosophy, reflecting that she had yet another year to stay

at school, and that Miss Denham was leaving at the holidays. Georgie was leaving and Winny was leaving, conditionally on a fit situation as governess being found for her after Christmas. Their separation drew very near. Georgie's affronted airs had begun it, Winny's stoical airs had perpetuated it—but Winny was glad, so glad when Georgie's success was secured, that she had to go away by herself and cry—and Winny was not given to crying.

It was soon after this—on a fine Saturday afternoon at the beginning of December, when all the world was amusing itself except Miss Winifred, who was darning a piece of fine lace for Mrs Brunton—that Eccles threw open the school-room door, and announced with a beaming face, 'Visitors for the young ladies!' and pretty Miss Otley that was, Mrs Lassells now, walked in, followed by a stately nurse bearing a baby in glorious apparel. All the school broke out into smiles and congratulations. Mrs Lassells was enthroned on Mrs Brunton's own chair, Mrs Brunton's own footstool was given

her, and the baby being laid in her lap, girls went down on their knees, and worshipped it.

'It is a boy,' said she. 'Give me room, and I will let you see his *foots*—his blessed little *foots!* They're *so* sweet!' And the blessed little foots being revealed, girls kissed them with rapture.

Miss Denham stood in the outer circle, looking on with sedate approval. There was a sort of impression in the school that babies were not much in Georgie's way—that she cared more for books—but Mrs Lassells ventured to look to her for some expression of feeling, and Georgie said, 'It is a meritorious production, and does you credit.'

'Ah, now, you are making fun, I know you are,' remonstrated the mother of the baby.

'Not at all. I am admiring the energy of character that was always latent in you, and that marriage has so happily developed. You are an honour to the school. You have fulfilled the whole duty of woman,' said Georgie with imperturbable gravity.

'And she would not have done it better even if she could spell cataclysm!' cried Miss Patrick, who occasionally said a stupid thing—the youngest child present felt that this was a very stupid thing.

The married woman blushed, laughed, and with a natural sequence of ideas, asked: 'Where is Miss Winifred?'

'Here—behind you,' said Winny, who had come to look at the baby over his mother's shoulder. 'I think he's wonderful!'

'Thank you, Miss Winifred! One word of praise from you is worth ten. Take a good kiss!' Winny accepted baby's bounty, and he then intimated his wish for a change of scene. The nurse carried him off, and his mother, eager to follow, began to shake hands all round. When she came to Miss Denham something struck her, and glancing at Miss Winifred, she asked: 'Have you two fallen out? You were as loving as turtles when I left.'

'And what makes you suppose we are less loving than turtles now?' said Miss Denham

as if the supposition were the height of absurdity.

'Oh, I don't know—nothing. Only, if you had, it is always wise to be a little foolish in love—forgiving, and all that. Good bye.'

With a degree of confusion of face amongst principals and assistants the remark passed; Miss Patrick only observing after Mrs Lassells was gone, that she could not have spoken more sagely if she had been an oracle—'Could she now, Miss Denham? Could she, Miss Winifred?' Neither of the authorities appealed to vouchsafed an answer.

In the last week of the half year the last Subjects were read, and the final award was to Miss Denham again. She took the prize—she took the three first class prizes, and in a modest, complacent fashion, she vastly enjoyed her triumph—she said her papa would be so pleased. But one thing was wanting to it—there is always one thing wanting to perfect our joy. Miss Winifred offered no felicitations.

'I'm sure, in her heart she is as glad as glad can be,' little Myra assured the great clever girl.

'I wish she'd tell me so!' said Georgie.

But Winny had grown shy of Georgie. They went home on the breaking-up day without so much as a formal leave-taking—better none than that, Georgie said. And they both lived in Cotham.

CHAPTER X.

CHECKS ON THE THRESHOLD.

Mrs Hesketh had not doubted, Winny had not doubted, that a suitable situation as governess would be found for her when it was wanted. But the Christmas holidays elapsed without a single application for her services having been made to Mrs Brunton, though she had circulated a notice amongst her patrons and patronesses that she had a capable young governess to recommend.

Delphine Mercier had come back from Switzerland, and was already in full occupation as a visiting teacher, acting in some cases as substitute for her father, but also taking classes on her own account. As early as eight o'clock on snowy, blowy mornings, Winny Hesketh saw her crossing Castle Green, on her way to a house a mile and a half out of the town, where

she officiated as governess to a numerous mixed young family for eighty pounds a year. She dined there, and at four of the afternoon was back in Cotham giving lessons in drawing and music, French, German, and Latin at various places. She was constantly busy until nine o'clock in the evening, either abroad or at home, and she told Winny that she was earning over two hundred a year. She was an admirable teacher, a sensible, practical girl, with no nonsense about her. Winny expressed a wish that she could do as Delphine did. Delphine shook her head; she did not exactly ask Winny where was her fitness for doing as she did, but she intimated something very like that. Winny knew that she knew very little.

'I shall have to take quite small children—if I have not much else I have patience,' she said to Delphine. But she was trying to make up for her deficiencies by diligent reading; and Mr Anderson still gave her music lessons, though he said she would never be a performer.

Mrs Hesketh was disappointed that Winny was not immediately in demand. She was

easily discouraged on her daughter's account—much more easily than she had ever been on her own. She was afraid that it had been a mistake to send her to the Manor, where she had drudged for others rather than learned herself; and she was easily persuaded to yield to Winny's desire to stay at home, and pursue her studies there instead of going back to the school at the end of the holidays. But six weeks after the re-assembling of the girls, Mrs Brunton called one morning at the house on Castle Green for the purpose of soliciting Miss Winifred's return for a week or two, until she could meet with another efficient half-boarder—the young lady she had taken after Christmas in that capacity was of no use at all, and Miss Hubbard and Mademoiselle were literally worn out for want of help. Winny could not refuse the request, and she went the same evening. But the week or two ran on to Midsummer, and she was not released.

Twice in the course of the half-year the hopes of an engagement dawned upon her, but only to be summarily extinguished. On the first

occasion she was called to Mrs Brunton's parlour to play a piece for the satisfaction of a plump and genial lady, who was seeking a governess for three little nieces who had been consigned to her from India. She spoke kindly to Winny, and assured her the piece was very neatly executed, but when the girl was gone out, she said: 'My dear Mrs Brunton, I believe all the good you tell me of her, but it would never do—consider my grown-up sons.'

On the second occasion an engagement was all but concluded for her by letter—an engagement to go for four years to Quebec, her expenses out and home being paid her, and an annual salary of sixty pounds. Her mother was willing that she should go, and Winny had made her up mind that she was going, when one day there arrived at Cotham the gentleman with whom rested the responsibility of engaging her on his daughter's behalf, and conveying her to Quebec. He was a greybeard soldier, very tall, very formal, not ungentle, an old man of the world. He sat in a chair looking at her with a grave humorous smile for nearly a minute,

and Winny read rejection in his eyes. He said she was too much of a child herself yet to go so far away from her mother.

'Miss Hesketh is nearly eighteen, and her fault of youth will diminish every day,' urged Mrs Brunton; and Winny pleaded that her mother had consented to her making the voyage. But the greybeard had said his say.

'Another failure I hear, Miss Winifred,' Mr Anderson observed that afternoon, shaking hands when she came to her music-lesson.

'Yes. I don't think anybody will have me who sees me beforehand,' replied she.

'Don't distress yourself about that—if you are not cut out for a governess you will make somebody a capital wife,' he rejoined.

Miss Winifred withdrew her hand coldly—so coldly that if the music-master had ever been tempted to make her a speech of the sort before, he was not encouraged to make her a speech of the sort again. Winny did not much like Mr Anderson.

When young folks encounter a persistent run of ill-luck they are apt to suppose that there

must be a fault in themselves, though they may say in extenuation that they cannot help it. Winny Hesketh certainly could not help the blindness to her merits of people wanting governesses, but it dejected her at odd moments —and then again she had a reckless fit.

'Good-bye, Miss Winifred, God bless you! I hope you *will* get on,' Miss Hubbard said to her at the last, and shook her head, and sighed. Winny sighed too—and then she echoed the faint hope expressed on her behalf with a vivacity that caused the woman of narrow experience to be more and more afraid for her—an unconverted heart.

Miss Hubbard and Miss Winifred had not grown in love, but habit had made them more tolerant. Miss Hubbard lived in expectation of the Millennium, and was of the same religion as Winny's uncle Hayland—with the difference that the yoke of everlasting toil, without sympathy and without relief, makes in the evidences of it acting on a harsh character. Winny remembered her afterwards with pity for her hard, dull life—but also with a devout prayer that

hardness and dulness in her own lot might never pervert her to a temper so oppressive and unjust as that which had made the misery of her school-days.

It was July, and very hot weather in Cotham. Families of gentility had abandoned its sun-baked streets for the refreshing breezes of the sea. The widow Hesketh had never been accustomed to need them, and Winny and she were left on Castle Green almost by themselves. They walked out one evening to Holworth Grange to find the house shut up, and its owners gone away for two months. Even Miss Baxter had started off into the country to visit her cousins at Wimpleburn. Mr Andrews also was away, prolonging his annual holiday, and Winny enjoyed his sitting-room—the coolest, airiest room in the house, with its north window fronting the river.

Into this quiet pause of existence entered Dick from London—an unsatisfactory young fellow, a very unsatisfactory young fellow indeed, his uncle Hayland wrote to his

mother with conscientious explicitness. Dick was scarcely so nice-looking as he had promised to be; he was lively and thoughtless, and perfectly selfish. He did not stay much at home, and never in the evening. Winny was surprised when her mother said she did not know where he went. Winny asked him, and Dick told her little girls ought not to be inquisitive. His holiday was for a month, and he was not sorry when it was over—he found Cotham and his mother's house very slow and dull. But he had taken Winny for a long walk sometimes, and once he had rowed her on the river in a boat, and she missed him when he was gone. Her mother suggested that she would do well to keep up these walks alone, and not mope indoors so much; and then Winny used to go off by herself, and loiter hours away in the fields and lanes, and by the waterside, but always she saw her mother's cap above the parlour-blind, watching for her return if she loitered late. The widow desired that Winny should acquire the habit of courage and self-dependence betimes, but she could

not divest herself of the mother-care for her woman-child. It had been very easy talking, but here was she, armed and equipped for the battle of life, and circumstances singing truce to her all this while!

Winny was not down-hearted though there was no opening in her prospects. She had often her pen in her hand, sometimes to indite a letter to Mildred Hutton, who had opened a brisk correspondence with her since Christmas; and sometimes to write pages of invention, which the widow Hesketh eyed askance, and privately condemned as idleness. She liked to see Winny drawing, or with a big volume of Hume or Gibbon or Rollin on the table before her, or to hear her practising a serious sonata; then she knew she was doing some good, but that scribbling she suspected. Winny would hide it away when she heard her mother coming, or else she would retreat with it to the house-top, where a lofty dormer in a queer little attic gave her an out-look far and wide over the dusk clustered roofs and chimney-pots of the ancient town, with glimpses of green gardens

hidden among the houses. Her mother asked why she betook herself up there? Because it was so still, she said, and she could see to such a distance. She might have said too—had she known it—that there was a mystery in the heavenly silences above the life of the town that fed her imagination. Yes. If Winny had her sad hours of wishful expectation, waiting for what did not come, and witnessing the almost impatient anxiety of her mother, she had her hours of refuge in the safe haven of her own mind where no trouble followed her, and flights of fancy into regions unattainable by the gnat swarm of petty cares.

If any reader be looking anxiously for the love-story to begin—that love-story without which no woman's life is worthy to be written—let me plead for patience a little longer. Winny Hesketh's love-story occupied but a brief time when she came to it, and she did not come to it yet. Her attachment to Miss Denham had given her a mild foretaste of the joys, the pains, and penalties of passion. There

is no measure in the romance of girls, and Winny fancied that she could never suffer more acutely even if one day she should have a lover who would use her ill. For she was ardently affectionate, and had scarcely known how dearly she loved Georgie until Georgie put her aside. It seemed by what followed that she was not one to be whistled back at the idle movement of caprice; but when she thought now of Georgie's advances towards a reconciliation, she blamed herself for not having had the confidence to meet them half-way.

Miss Denham was absent from Cotham for several months that spring and summer, but in July, when the rest of the world was gone to the sea, she came home. Daily she rode abroad attended by an old groom, and almost daily she rode across Castle Green, and stared at Mrs Hesketh's parlour window. Winny often saw her, but she never saw Winny until one sultry morning on the Holworth Road, when Winny was out for a long ramble, and she overtook and passed her without looking round. She put her horse to a canter, kicking

up a fine dust, and Winny's heart was greatly straightened. But she went on, and then she saw that Georgie was returning at a leisure pace. She was returning, and evidently bent on challenging the pale pedestrian, who smiled involuntarily as their eyes met. 'Let us be friends again, Winny,' said Miss Denham, reaching down her hand. 'Yes,' said Winny, giving hers. And they had the wisdom to leave explanation alone, both then and for ever afterwards.

Georgie turned again, reined in her horse, and Winny walked alongside her for a blissful hour. They went beyond the Grange, as far as the old mill and the weir upon the Foss that young Cairns had sketched. Rarely had Winny walked so far before—she saw the picture just as he had drawn it, and wondered for a moment what had become of him—he was gone from Cotham long since. Before the friends parted a next meeting was arranged, and these meetings soon became frequent enough to add a distinct happiness to Winny Hesketh's life. By and by Georgie called to

see her at home, and brought her flowers and books, and was her loving comrade again. The widow Hesketh approved the intimacy, sent them in coffee, and left them to their own company. They never tired one another. Whatever intellectual fineness there was in either the other had the touch that brought it out. They discoursed of books chiefly, and perhaps Winny confided a little of what she wrote in the attic commanding the neighbours' roofs. Georgie's studies and diversions were of a harder type, taking a divergent line towards the masculine. A poor curate was giving her lessons in Latin, Greek, and mathematics, and she was the favourite child of her father, the leading lawyer of Cotham. Winny had to listen more than she talked, and she tried to be interested in Georgie's pet subjects, because they were Georgie's, more than because she understood them. One day she went by invitation to visit her friend at her own house, and was shown to Georgie's sanctum at the end of a long passage, remote from the family-rooms. And good

reason why. Georgie was engaged with the bones of a sparrow. There was a piano in her den, but there was a galvanic battery also, and queer shapes of glass and metal, and queerer things in bottles—queer smells, too, that recalled Miss Baxter's shop—many matters, in fact, to Winny totally incomprehensible, but which probably witnessed to the chemical and other experiments of their owner. Winny opened a volume on the table at a plate of the human figure showing the muscles: 'O Georgie! what's this? It's anatomy!' cried she.

'It is St Bartholomew—shut it up, quick,' said Georgie. 'Be satisfied to know that you are fearfully and wonderfully made, and leave the how and the why to stronger nerves.'

'Indeed, I'm willing! I never could remember which was which of auricles and ventricles in Blair's Preceptor,' said Winny, clapping up the awful tome with hasty obedience. 'But are you going to be a doctor, Georgie?' she inquired amazed.

'There's no chance! I would be a physician

if I were of the other sex—I mean to learn all I can as it is. Quietly, of course.'

'If ever I am ill, I'll come to you to be cured. You would not hurt me more than you could help, Georgie?'

Georgie, with her pre-occupied face over the bones of the sparrow, her wide forehead, level brows, and close coils of dark hair looked very student-like, indeed. Winny told her so. Then Georgie put aside her work, and answered gaily: 'That is why you are fond of me, Winny—we are opposites. Now, shall I sing for you, or will you go into the garden?' Winny would be sung to first, and go into the garden afterwards; and when she went home, she went laden with flowers and carrying a big book that Georgie laid orders upon her to read with utmost carefulness. It was the earliest of those famous volumes that came out under the name of 'A Graduate of Oxford.'

Winny Hesketh felt no vacancy in her days now. The Manor School re-assembled in August, but she had done with it. Mrs Brunton intimated that she would be better employed

in her former work than living idly at home, but Mrs Hesketh replied that Winny occupied herself from morning till night, and was preparing her outfit against the time when a situation for her turned up. The widow had been displeased that Mrs Brunton made Winny no recompense for her last half-year's services —except an old bonnet of violet velvet and satin, which her mother indignantly made over to the milkman's wife—a wiggy old woman, fond of finery, whom it admirably became. 'Mrs Brunton acquits herself cheaply of an obligation—other people will serve you the same, Winny, if you allow it,' said she. 'It will be time enough to wear cast clothing when you are hopelessly poor, and out of luck.'

As the summer declined and the evenings lengthened, Winny was less at her books, and more at her needle. She was not so averse to it now, because she could think out her thoughts as she sewed. But she begun to long for a situation, and to weary of the insupportable burden of nothing to do—as those who must work for a living regard unprofitable waiting.

She had never had the spending of money, and imagined that it would go much further than it will. Her mother had been very handsome in the provision of underclothing for her start in life, but Winny had nice notions of cambric and lace, and wanted more of the dainty devices of dress than she had the materials to compose. She did not reflect whether, as a governess, she would need them, but she asked for more. Then her mother told her all that she had to live upon. Winny had no means of making comparisons, but it sounded very little.

'I counted on your being able to clothe and maintain yourself, once you had done with school,' said the widow. 'You shall have whatever is necessary for a beginning, but cambric is ten shillings the yard, and fine thread lace'——

Winny was ashamed of her greediness, and said so. But the next day her mother produced the key of the yellow chest, and told her where to seek, and she would find Dick's and her own baby-things, and gave her leave to pick off the lace cap-borders, and to make what she

could of the pretty embroidered and tucked frocks. Winny did it cheerfully, and wrought for herself an array of frills, tuckers, cuffs, and chemisettes that her mother said would long outlast their fashion, and wear for many, many years.

CHAPTER XI.

A BEGINNING.

It is a long lane that never has a turn. Winny Hesketh came to a turn in hers in September, almost as soon as the tuckers and frills were ready. She had been that afternoon to Miss Baxter's for the household tea and coffee, and was approaching her mother's door in one direction as a tall and handsome lady reached it from another. They met at the step, and looked one at the other.

'This is Mrs Hesketh's house? Perhaps you are Miss Winifred?' the lady said. And Winny said, 'Yes;' her heart leaping, eyes brightening, colour rising at the sight of this personage, who had all the air of seeking a governess, and of having found her.

Winny opened the front door and the parlour door, and the stranger walked in. The widow

Hesketh was seated at a round table in the window with her spectacles on, reading a book —it was come to spectacle-time with the widow Hesketh, though her soft brown eyes had lost none of their beauty. She rose with a grave dignity, and recognised the Honourable Mrs Broome of Hall Green. Winny offered the lady a chair opposite her mother's, and then took one herself at a respectful, convenient distance.

Mrs Broome told her business in a few words. She wanted a young person with a good accent and a knowledge of music as sub-governess to her four daughters, to act under the direction of a French lady who had charge of their education. The young person would have opportunities of self-improvement, and these opportunities Mrs Broome offered in lieu of salary.

Winny watched her mother's face for the effect of this proposal. There was no visible emotional effect: the widow had a well-guarded countenance. When Mrs Broome had spoken, there was a perceptible silence. Then Mrs Hesketh said in her quiet, deliberate way: 'I

cannot let my daughter go anywhere without salary. She must have, at least, sufficient to clothe herself.'

Mrs Broome represented that the advantages of a beginning in her family would be more than an equivalent. Mrs Hesketh concisely replied that it would not suit her circumstances to be at any charges for her child when her services were at the disposal of strangers. At length, Mrs Broome mentioned ten pounds as a sum that it was impossible she should exceed. Winny waited a minute to give her mother time to answer, but the widow answered only with an appealing gesture to Winny, whose countenance was radiant with fun and mischief. 'Never mind, mother, I can make it do,' said she. To which her mother rejoined: 'You will find it very small *doing*, Winny.'

Mrs Broome was not accustomed to this ease of inferior persons in her presence, and her manner became less affable. She glanced from mother to daughter with a degree of surprise. If the mother thought that her daughter's

services were grievously undervalued, the daughter was clearly moved to mirth by the comic aspect of her own depreciation—Miss Winifred had, however, been earnestly recommended to her as an assiduous and capable young person, and Mrs Broome was too prudent to miss such an acquisition because of an unseasonable sprightliness. Winny was engaged by her at this munificent salary of ten pounds, to go to Hall Green on the first of October. Hall Green was only five miles distant from Cotham, and as there was no public conveyance except the carrier's cart, Mrs Broome said the carriage should call for her in the afternoon of the day fixed, weather permitting.

'Launched, at last!' Winny said as she gazed after the majestic retiring figure of the lady.

Her mother expressed her chagrin, her severe mortification, at the low estimate formed of Winny's worth, after the years and the money that had been spent upon her training for a governess.

'O mother, there are hundreds of governesses to be had as cheap,' said Winny. 'Governesses have to take what they can get, and to put up with anything—that is the popular theory as regards governesses.'

'But, Winny, I do not wish you to put up with anything. Remember you have a mother, and a good home to come to,' said the widow, and she trembled. She shrank from the idea of Winny having to suffer hardship, though she feared no hardship for herself.

That evening Winny brought forth her new clothes, and marked them with her name, their number, and the year, and her mother pressed them with a hot iron to make the writing indelible. While they worked, they talked—chiefly of past events, long past. At every great change, the widow's memory went back on the early years of her married life, told over again her hopes that had been deceived, and her expectations that had never been fulfilled. Into the midst of the old story entered Delphine Mercier, and was informed by Winny that her fate was come.

'In what shape?' said Delphine contemplating the fair white heap of linen.

'In the shape of Mrs Broome of Hall Green, and a salary of ten pounds a year, with opportunities of improving myself under a French superior.'

'Ten pounds! That *is* modest. What lots of fine, beautiful linen—you might be going to be married!'

'I shall never be married. My mother is giving me my *trousseau* now—she does not approve of marriage, and love and nonsense, do you, mother? O Delphine, don't I wish I were a boy!'

'Don't let me hear you wish that again, Winny,' interposed the widow severely. 'Is Dick any better than you are, or better off? Be content to be what God has made you.'

The girls exchanged amused glances, and Delphine whispered to her friend: 'And don't make a mock at the little god, or he will be even with you some day!'

Then they began to discourse of the afternoon's event in its practical bearings. Delphine

assured Mrs Hesketh that ten pounds was not really so bad for a first engagement. If Winny was to adopt the vocation of teacher for good and all, the higher the connection she formed at the outset, the more to her advantage would it be in the future. Mrs Hesketh was only too desirous of believing what was said to comfort her, and mentioned that she would give Winny a new French merino dress and velvet bonnet to take to Hall Green, as winter was so near at hand, and she would have so little money to go on with.

'Indeed, mother, you won't!' cried Winny. 'I shall dress within my income, and my last winter's beaver bonnet is all the bonnet I shall have this year.' Her mother looked disturbed, but she did not argue the matter, and Delphine Mercier wondered that Winny dared speak so imperatively.

The next morning the widow Hesketh and her daughter went out together to make their last purchases. They went to Radstock's—Mr Radstock's goods were always of excellent

quality, and as he was retiring from business, an honestly enriched man, his faithful customer calculated on meeting with one or two fair bargains. The French merino was a former promise, and Winny's wardrobe needed it—a tawny violet was the colour she chose, and a fabric so soft that it was a pleasure to stroke it.

'And you must have a shawl—please to show me some shawls,' Mrs Hesketh was saying to the shopman as Mr Radstock himself came up behind the counter. The shopman brought forward a package of Scotch tartan shawls, as Winny, in an energetic undertone, urged upon her mother that she did not want a shawl —her fur tippet was quite enough—and her mother turned a deaf ear.

'Is it for Miss Hesketh? Bring that white Paisley with the palm-leaf border,' said the master. Mr Radstock himself unfolded and displayed it. Winny's eyes approved its delicate texture and design, but she shook her head. 'It is never out of date, and young or old may wear it. This is my last day in the old shop, Mrs Hesketh, and if you'll allow me,

I should like to present it to your little daughter —she is just beginning the world.'

The widow Hesketh appeared much gratified. She was not a lover of gifts, but she had no scruple about accepting this gift for Winny from so old a friend, and on such an occasion. Winny thanked Mr Radstock with a girlish gratitude and delight. It was, indeed, a beautiful shawl to have given unexpectedly and so opportunely.

'What kind people there are,' she said to her mother as they left the shop.

'Yes, Winny. You may never have the chance of returning Mr Radstock's kindness, but you may pass it on, if it be in your power. Now we will go to Mrs Trym, and see what she can make you a velvet bonnet for—you cannot wear that shawl and your old beaver bonnet together. It would be out of all character.'

But Winny still protested. 'I would much rather not have a new bonnet, mother—much rather not. In the country my old beaver and fur tippet will do very well. I am to have no holiday at Christmas, you remember.'

Her mother let her prevail. It was not difficult, with truly a very slender purse. However, all Winny's needfuls were bought now, and paid for, except the trunk to put them in; and that having been found, covered with black leather, and profusely ornamented with brass nails, and her initials set upon the lid, her equipment was complete. Delphine Mercier sat by while Winny packed up her gear.

'There is an air of finality about it, Winny,' said she.

'I feel like going to sea without any port in view,' Winny answered meditatively. After a brief rest she resumed her task, and finished it in silence.

Before she left home Miss Hutton came to bid her good-bye. Twice while she was waiting for an engagement Miss Hutton had invited Winny to pay her a visit, but Mrs Hesketh had declined the invitation for her daughter, and Winny had submitted—perhaps, she did not greatly desire the treat in her circumstances. When Mildred heard, however, that her friend

was leaving Cotham to live amongst strangers, she was seized with an irresistible yearning to see her.

Mildred wanted sympathy. *Her* love-story was in its initial chapter, and her heart ached to tell it; for it had but a thwarted beginning. The most copious of letters availed but poorly for the purpose, and as Winny might not come to her she went to Winny, and for three days did she drone in Winny's patient ears the monotonous rondo of a true love whose course was running anything but smoothly. Such waywardness of parents and guardians had never been heard of before! Mildred had a turquoise ring to show—a betrothal ring; for this rough wooing had got the length of an engagement between the young folks, before the elders opened their eyes, and interposed with vain precautions and angry vetoes. Mammon was Love's adversary now as Mammon so often is. Love's present name was Frank, and Winny was bidden to believe that Frank was all Mildred's words and fancy painted him. Her age was nineteen. His age was twenty, and he

was entirely dependent upon his father. It was evident, even to Winny's romantic mind, that they had taken time by the forelock in arranging their lives, and she thought it possible (barely possible of course) that the perverse parents and guardians had some excuse for opposition, and a reasonable plea for delay. But Mildred was convinced that she had given her heart for good and all, and would admit of none. In that case, Winny said, she hoped the parents and guardians might be brought to see the error of their ways. Her sympathy was lively rather than enthusiastic, and she made Mildred laugh at herself instead of crying.

Nothing else got itself talked of, unless it were the kindred theme of Mildred's poetry. They sat for hours in Winny's room, in the midst of her trunks and boxes, but if Mildred asked one question about Hall Green she did not stay for an answer—the self-absorbed garrulity of the tender passion left her no tongue to spare for common topics. Winny did not seem much to regard it, but she was almost relieved when Mildred went away, because she wished to have

her last evening with her mother alone. Her mother talked of Winny's concerns as devotedly as Mildred talked of her own. Winny loved Georgie, and she loved Mildred, but she knew that her mother was her fastest and surest friend. The widow said as much to her daughter before they parted.

'I hope we are acting wisely, and I believe we are, Winny dear. But if you fall into trouble, remember your mother is bound to help you through all—and you'll come to me.'

Winny promised that she would. And so she set forth on that voyage of which she did not see the port.

CHAPTER XII.

HALL GREEN.

THE Honourable Edward Broome was the sixth son of a Scotch earl. He was bred to the Church, but had married early, and sought no preferment. His wife was the heiress of Hall Green. Her father had made a fortune as a shipbuilder at Whitcliff in the days before iron came up. His fortune made, Mr Acklam retired from the briny scene of his successful labours and speculations to the agricultural neighbourhood of Cotham, where he bought a small estate with a quarry upon it, and built a hall in the Gothic style, a very stony edifice, indeed, until time clothed its turrets, mullions and buttresses with a variegated garment of foliage and flowers, and raised to maturity the plantations with which its twenty acres of park were belted. The fortune that had satisfied

the modest ambition and homely habits of Mr Acklam would hardly satisfy a superior clerk of now-a-days for salary. But what he had, his daughter inherited; and as she was a beauty besides, and educated at Cotham Manor School, she achieved a local celebrity while still in her teens. Mr Edward Broome met her at a ball in those parts. He was a fine-looking young Scotchman, blue-eyed and yellow-haired, standing six foot two in his stockings, a diligent dancer and an agreeable person, but absolutely penniless. Miss Acklam was just out of mourning for her father, and her guardians were at their wits' end how to dispose of her—whether to remit her to the cloistered shades of the Manor School—when this gentleman came forward as a suitor for her hand. There was no impediment except his want of fortune, and the young lady, blessed with a will of her own, decided that she had fortune enough for both. They were married. Hall Green was ready to receive them as a home, and the society of the neighbourhood spread its arms to welcome them. Three sons and four daughters were

born in their house—handsome, healthy, good children all, but the fortune that was ample for two, three-and-twenty years ago, was strait for the nine they had increased to, when Mrs Broome sought a sub-governess to work without wages, and was urged by the counter-necessities of the widow Hesketh to give ten pounds for the commodity that could not be had for nothing. In short, the Broomes of Hall Green were gentle-folks, people of quality, as Cotham said, but poor as poor could be, and Mrs Broome very mean in her ways.

It was a lovely autumnal afternoon, towards five o'clock, when Winny Hesketh first saw Hall Green. She had never lived in the country, and it seemed to her a paradise. The children were in the garden, watching for the carriage with half shy curiosity. They were girls of nine, ten, twelve, and fifteen, fair and attractive every one. The eldest, Mab, conducted the stranger to mamma in the drawing-room; and after a few formally kind words of reception, Mrs Broome said that perhaps Miss Hesketh would like to stay out of doors until

the children's tea-time, and they would show her the garden. This met Winny's views exactly, and, attended by all the four, she was made free of the place very soon, and received a variety of information that came in useful later.

The place was destitute of natural beauty, level as a bowling-green, but the trees were well-grouped and grown, and the shrubberies were luxuriant. The garden proper was not large, but, being separated by only a sunk fence from the park, so-called, it had an air of spaciousness, and the expanse beyond was profitable and ornamental as pasture for the Alderney cows that supplied the family dairy, and even contributed butter to Cotham market.

The children were summoned to tea ten minutes before it was on the table, and Miss Hesketh was taken to her room by Jane, the young ladies' maid, who fetched them in. First up a broad flight of stairs—stone stairs, but covered with a hard-worn red Wilton carpet—then through a swing-door, just beyond which Jane introduced the new governess to

the empty schoolroom; down a stone passage covered with matting; up a flight of winding steps, steep and bare, and stone too, into a turret chamber, a perfect sky parlour. The evening light was full in it—east, west, and north turned its bird's-eye windows. Winny exclaimed at its liberal prospects. The furniture was scanty, and where the fire should have been, there was an open chimney in the thickness of the wall, too favourable by half for the circulation of air.

'Pleasant now, but shivery in winter,' was its young tenant's second thoughts. And then she unlocked her grand new trunk, took out a dress prepared for evening wear, and made a rapid despatch of her toilette for tea. The two youngest girls came to convoy her down, lest she should lose her way. Sis, the smallest of all, took her hand in the passage, and recommended her to observe that it was dark, and not wide.

The schoolroom was in twilight too, but Miss Hesketh saw that besides her pupils who were to be, two ladies stood there—Mrs Broome

and old Mam'zell. Jane was setting the chairs for tea. Mab seated herself in front of the tray, and appointed her new governess to a place at her right hand. The other three girls settled themselves, and after seeing the first cups poured out and handed round, the elder ladies prepared to leave the young party. But before going, Mrs Broome addressed a question to Miss Hesketh: 'We have been used to breakfast all together at nine o'clock, Miss Hesketh. Would you prefer a schoolroom breakfast?'

'Yes—at eight o'clock, if you please,' said Winny with instant decision. As Mrs Broome went downstairs she remarked to old Mam'zell that she thought the young person would do.

It was a very cheerful tea. In fact, it may be stated once for all that the Broomes were good children—not perfect angels—but honest, truthful, well-disposed, affectionate to one another, and if not fond out of their family, taught to be courteous to everybody. Sis took Miss Hesketh under her protection and patronage at once, and Mab, a sweet, tall, womanly girl,

laughed at them. Perhaps she had a slight sense of superiority in being able to look over her new governess's head.

When tea was over one by one the girls were called out, and came back in white frocks, and with blue ribbons in their hair—there was a dinner-party at Hall Green that evening. The interval until they were summoned downstairs was spent in conning the next day's lessons. By and by came a knock at the door, and Simmons put in his blooming face, and announced: 'Dessert is on the table, young ladies,' and away they all went, Mab moderating their rush with elder-sisterly decorum. Some twenty minutes later Sis reappeared, very important, bearing a plate, and Mab lighting her up. Promptly she spoke.

'I asked papa to send you some dessert, Miss Hesketh—here's grapes and a pear and a bit of sponge-cake. I wanted nuts too, but papa said, Be off—Miss Hesketh is not a squirrel!'

'Papa has sent you the *Daily News* instead,' added Mab, offering the paper.

'I like that better,' said Winny, frankly accepting it.

'How funny! She likes news better than nuts,' mused Sis; and being returned to the drawing-room, she announced the odd fact with an admirable comic air of discovery, for which somebody kissed her. Kisses came much and often in Sis's way.

The next interruption was from the three young ones, come to say good-night, and at nine o'clock Mab appeared to perform the same ceremony, and to see that Miss Hesketh had supper. But Winny had eaten her sponge-cake and grapes, and wanted no supper. Last of all came old Mam'zell: diminutive, wrinkled, covered up to the chin in black silk and lace. She looked very old, very tired and jaded. She sat down with her young coadjutor who laid aside the newspaper, ready to listen if she were talked to. Old Mam'zell gazed at her long, dimly, scrutinisingly, then said in a tone of mixed remonstrance and regret: 'But how you are *pretty!*'

It was not so bad an introduction of herself.

It was not in girl-nature that Winny should be otherwise than pleased: 'I shall not be the less useful for that,' she said blushing rather shyly. Old Mam'zell shook her head with a slow, sad motion, resting her hands upon her knees, and turning her eyes to the cold empty grate. After a few minutes of silence she rose feebly, and intimated that it was bed-time. Winny was glad of it. She was weary and slept profoundly, and was up again at six in the morning, with a light heart, and good courage for her work.

It is not necessary to dilate on the said work. All the world knows that simple, monotonous routine. Winny found her yoke easy, and her burden comparatively light at Hall Green. Clemmy, the second girl, was shrewd and clever; the other three were sweetly bright at everything but books. Old Mam'zell had reigned supreme in schoolrooms for fifty years, and clouded as her faculties were becoming, she never forgot how to give a lesson. Winny soon caught her way, and soon—*too* soon—Mrs Broome discerned that the old Mam'zell

was but a lay-figure that could be done without, and that the young person who had been engaged to assist was quite capable of superseding her. Winny never thought of it. In the long winter evenings old Mam'zell and she were company for each other. The children went downstairs to dessert, and they were left alone. Old Mam'zell dined when there was a dinner-party, but Winny was never invited to leave the schoolroom. She mentioned to her mother that there was to be a grand Christmas-Eve entertainment, and her mother sent her out by the carrier a pair of beautiful white kid gloves. Winny thanked her warmly in her next letter, and said the entertainment went off capitally—but she omitted to say that she had none of the fun. Mrs Broome had a great deal of fine, honourable feeling, and she did not approve of creating a confusion of ranks. She allowed Miss Hesketh to understand, at once, what her position was at Hall Green, and Winny took it up with perfect philosophy. She did not even find it dull. She had enough to do in the five hours which were allotted to

lessons, and she had to walk with the children once a day, or twice if the weather was not fit for garden games. In the evening old Mam'zell talked French with her, or if she were silent, Winny scribbled a little, and amused herself.

The days began to be bright and long while they were still very cold. March sun and March winds had their full play upon the plain that surrounded Hall Green. Old Mam'zell watched them advancing with a sharp and anxious visage. One evening, sitting in her place by the schoolroom fire, Winny heard her say to herself twice over: 'I shall have to go. I shall have to go.'

'To go where, Mam'zell?' she asked unconcernedly.

'To go away—to leave Hall Green,' was the answer with a series of rapid, confidential nods.

'Oh no!' cried Winny, and came and sat down on a low stool beside her. She took the poor shrivelled hands in hers, and put them to her lips.

'I shall have to go—you will see,' reiterated old Mam'zell; and Winny became deeply reflective.

Before long Winny did see. Old Mam'zell was accustomed to attend the two elder girls to Cotham in the carriage for their dancing lesson, if Mrs Broome did not find it convenient to escort them herself. One bitter fine day when it so happened, old Mam'zell had a cold and a bad cough, and had not been out for a week. Mrs Broome said indignantly to her husband that she was of no use at all now.

'Send Miss Hesketh,' suggested the gentleman.

'Who is to teach Sissy and Bee while Miss Hesketh is absent?' rejoined the lady. It ended, however, by Miss Hesketh's being sent, and Mrs Broome took that opportunity of speaking to old Mam'zell of what had been for some weeks gathering force in her intentions.

'She was very kind,' old Mam'zell said to Winny afterwards, and then she ran on into a long story. 'She has always been very kind—little Mab was but four years old when I came

first to Hall Green. And I shall go and close my days in my own country—that is France.' The tears rose to Winny's eyes at the sound of the pathetic, resigned voice, at the sight of the almost senile face.—'You understand that after forty—fifty years, one does not find many left one knew. But the good God is merciful, and it may be that I have not long to live. Seventy-two, my dear, seventy-two, I am, and have had health always, and my breakfast in bed never, never since I went into families.—Mr Levison, he was my first pupil—he and his sister, the Lady Mounteagle, who is dead a long while ago. And then I was in Ireland seven years with the Barrowcliffs—Lord Barrowcliff and his brother—bad little boys as ever you see. O torments! I had to threaten them with the police—they did fight so. And their mother only said: "Let them do—let them fight, and hurt themselves: there is no teacher like painful experience." Painful experience, indeed! Ah, I know it!'

Winny had to laugh through her tears often as old Mam'zell recited her catalogue of adven-

tures. She had a lively memory and a witty humour. 'It was the ambassador's wife who brought me to London—I have lived in none but great houses—and she was my good friend always until she died, and I lost her. I was beginning to go down the hill, as you say, when Mrs Broome engaged me, and she would give no more than forty pounds. I have not laid by much, and I have lost some in a company of sacks—one year I had no dividend, and then it gave up. If you are to be always a governess, make yourself worth money—make yourself worth money. With Miss Clough, who is the Duchess of Tufton, I had two hundred pounds salary—that was a great deal, but then I had lived in society.'

'I will not be always a governess—I will not wear out in thankless service. How old must a woman be to defy the tongues of men, and live as her own mistress? That is what I shall do,' Winny said, her projects taking shape with the words that defined them.

'You might marry—if you had some little *dot*,' suggested old Mam'zell diffidently.

'But I have no little *dot*. And my mother does not counsel girls to marry.'

'Your mother did marry herself—ah, possibly she has reasons. At thirty—at thirty a woman is as wise and prudent as she is ever likely to be—at thirty she may live as it pleases her, if she can, and defy the tongues of men.'

At thirty! Oh, what venerable years! The age of liberty with propriety appeared to Winny Hesketh a long way off, indeed.

Old Mam'zell reverted to her own business. 'Mrs Broome is very good, very thoughtful—she advised that I must go before the next winter—the winter in Northshire is cold. I think I shall go to Paris—to Paris. It was there I lived with *maman*.'

From this, and a little more Winny learnt that old Mam'zell had neither home nor friend to turn to in that strange city that she called her country. It seemed exquisitely sad. Winny asked that night if she might go to her room with her, and if she could help her at all; but it seemed that Jane was attentive to her. The next morning she tottered into the schoolroom

at her usual hour. Mab set her chair. Sis brought her Bible. She gazed vacantly at the children, and asked some untimely question, which Mab answered as if it were all in due course. Lessons began, and went on until noon. She heard all her pupils read, and saw them go out to walk, their young governess with them. She watched them gathering snowdrops in the drive, and stood at the window until they were out of sight along the road, and then Jane came in, bringing her a basin of soup.

'Old Mam'zell's ill, and they don't see it,' the servant told her fellows when she returned to their quarters. 'Missis has given her warning to leave, and she's fretting. Poor soul! it's not much she can do, but she's wrapt up in the young ladies.'

At luncheon, however, Mr Broome did see it, and afterwards spoke of it to his wife, proposing that Dr Archer should be sent for. Mrs Broome did not consider that necessary—old Mam'zell always had this winter-cough, she said; change of air would take it away, and perhaps they

had better hasten her departure. Mr Broome never argued with his wife, but he commonly had his way in the house. He went out to take a walk, and walked to Cotham, and was brought back in Dr Archer's carriage. Mrs Broome was in the village when they arrived at Hall Green, but she returned in time to hear the physician's report.

'My dear madam, old Mam'zell will never make that journey you have recommended to her. Be thankful that she has not started; for she would assuredly die upon the road.'

When Winny Hesketh was told this her eyes filled—but she thought death was coming kindly to close old Mam'zell's long service. And Mrs Broome was thankful that, as the event turned, she was under a familiar roof. Christian charity and patience were put to no long trial on her account. A few days of feeble suffering, a few days of wandering weakness, a visit from her priest, an hour's unconsciousness, and old Mam'zell drifted away, and was safe past the waves of this troublesome world.

CHAPTER XIII.

PERILS IN THAT STATE OF LIFE.

WHAT difference old Mam'zell's removal would make to Winny, or whether it would make any, was a consideration that naturally occurred to her mother. Mrs Broome intimated that Miss Hesketh was too young for the sole charge of her daughters, but added that she would not make a change without giving her due notice. Mab and Clemmy had already begun to have music-lessons with Mr Anderson on the day they went to Cotham for the dancing-class. Other accomplishments Mrs Broome was not concerned for. Her girls had not conspicuous ability, and she disapproved of forcing and over-educating them. She made her appearance in the schoolroom frequently, at first, to see that work progressed as it should, but she had to put the drag on the young governess

rather than to give her the spur. Winny did her duty with a conscience, and achieved the triumph of making her pupils do the same; so that if she had to spend half a day in Cotham with the two elder girls, she could rely on the two younger ones practising and preparing their work in her absence as diligently as if she were at their elbow.

Mrs Broome found her soon a most convenient, adaptable, obliging young person to have in her family. At midsummer, when the three boys came home from school, a month at Whitcliffe was decreed, and Mrs Broome consulted Miss Hesketh as to whether it would not be for the good of her health to go to the sea with the children—where they might do as little lessons as they pleased—rather than to go to Castle Green; and Mrs Hesketh being very much of that opinion, Winny never went home at all that year. Miss Denham was invited for a week by Mrs Broome to make it more like a holiday for Miss Hesketh, and Georgie's company and conversation on the sands, and her

singing to the cranky old hired piano, were, indeed, supreme joys to Winny, and came too soon to an end.

After the return to Hall Green there was no more allusion to change except what Miss Hesketh made herself. She said to Mrs Broome: 'Clemmy has a turn for arithmetic, and she knows all I can teach her. But she wishes to go further—if you will let her have a lesson once a week with the schoolmaster, I can manage all the other lessons easily.'

'How far can she go?' Mrs Broome inquired.

'She can do rule of three, and compound long division and simple interest'——

'Then she can do quite enough. What does she want with more? I never have to do a rule of three sum. If my household accounts are complicated I carry them to Mr Broome. However, I will speak to him, and hear what he has to say about Clemmy.'

Mr Broome said Clemmy might have the schoolmaster to teach her arithmetic if she liked, but in his judgment, it was not requisite;

he thought Miss Hesketh quite clever enough to teach anything.

'No, Edward, no,' said his wife, 'there you are too partial. Miss Hesketh teaches history nicely, and makes it interesting to the children —by the by, she asks for your Oxford book of dates—and she understands geography, but Clemmy is quicker in putting her finger on a place in the map. Miss Hesketh is a painstaking elementary governess, but she is not brilliantly accomplished. Her music is just so, so. Of her drawing I do not pretend to give an opinion. She is a fair English scholar, if one may say as much of a girl of her age, and she will improve Mab's mind, for I don't believe she ever talks nonsense, but we must not put her on a level with old Mam'zell'—if Mrs Broome had completed the sentence with the thought that was in her mind she would have said—'as regards salary'—for it had already been suggested to her that she must not expect from Miss Hesketh a second year of instruction for her daughters at a salary of ten pounds.

Mrs Brunton had forewarned Winny that she must set a value upon herself and assert it, and Delphine Mercier had said energetically: 'If Mrs Broome will not give you thirty pounds—leave—*leave*.' But Winny was one of those characters who seem born with an indifference to money—she thought it quite of secondary account in her condition; and being well and contented in other respects, she did not care to risk the permanence of her engagement. When Mrs Broome, at her year's end, handsomely proposed to double her salary, Winny accepted her proposal with thanks, and did not tell Delphine what she had done until she asked her.

Winny Hesketh may now be considered as fairly embarked in her vocation. It neither tired nor disgusted her, and she filled it with the cheerful countenance that tells of a heart in prosperity. That occasional day in Cotham was a great boon. Mab and Clemmy had their music-lesson at the Manor School, by favour of Mrs Brunton, and while they were safe under that lady's wing their governess could do Mrs

Broome's commissions, and devote a few happy minutes to her mother. The widow Hesketh was perfectly satisfied with her child's air and aspect in these days, and she herself wore a look of peace. At the dancing-class, which met in the large room of the Talbot Inn, Miss Hesketh had to mount guard all the time, but Miss Denham frequently contrived to come in, and alleviate a portion of the two hours' tedium of fiddle and figures.

And there were other governesses, native and foreign, old, middle-aged and young, with whom the Hall Green governess had the opportunity of making acquaintance if she chose. But, perhaps, she was reserved; for, with two exceptions, she never advanced beyond the civility of a bow. The one exception was Miss Molyneux, an elderly, formal person, who had been governess to the Lady Hollingford, and was now governess to the Lady Hollingford's three daughters. She was an excellent woman, and conceived quite a kindness for the bright-eyed, intelligent young governess who paid her respect as a senior of honour in the

profession. The other exception was a German girl of not more than sixteen—a fair-haired, soft-eyed little Gretchen, who gave Winny a score of idle confidences in a day. Winny would not have been attracted to her, but she threw herself upon Winny, who never could repulse anyone who appeared unfriended. She let Winny know that her father was a poor pastor in Hesse, that her mother was an invalid, that they were eight children at home, and herself the eldest but one. She would speak of them all, of her sisters and brothers tenderly, pathetically, and in the next breath would appeal for an approval of a fresh sprig in her bonnet, of a bow on her shoe, of a trifling alteration in an old dress—for she was no richer in money than Winny, and she had much more occasion for display. She was a childish creature, impulsive and ignorant, but she could play as scarcely one English governess in a hundred can play, and could sing like an angel. She was in the house of the Lady Repton, to speak German and coax music into her one little girl—a petted, insolent darling, whose

ill-humours were treated as charms and graces.

Lord Repton was a country gentleman of æsthetic tastes; his wife was a very gay and fashionable lady. Their seat was about a mile beyond Holworth Mill, and the *Cotham Gazette* rarely came out on a Saturday without some account of festivities at Repton House. In these festivities the young foreigner had a capricious share, of which she loved to tell Winny the details—and, indeed, Winny heard her talked of by visitors who lunched at Hall Green. She was admired and compassionated. A lady said Repton House was not a nice house for a friendless young foreigner to live in, and Mrs Broome rejoined that in her opinion the friendless young foreigner was very unfit for her office of governess. If a dance were the order of the evening Gretchen had the most beautiful waltzes, galops, quadrilles at her finger-ends. If music were in request, who could sing so sweet a ballad, so moving a passion-song as that child-stranger to whom love and life were equal mysteries? Lady

Repton grew vain of her nightingale, and brought her more and more forward amongst her guests, ever eager to be amused. That winter private theatricals were the rage, and Gretchen could act a simple story, they said, divinely. Winny blushed, and grew almost sick of the triumphs and vanities that were poured into her ears, with complaints of poor clothes, and cravings for better. By and by the poor clothes improved, but at the same time the blithe frivolity was clouded, the soft eyes became timid, and the too candid tongue embarrassed in its revelations. Winny said to her one day that she must not run into debt for pretty things—that would be *too* foolish—adding, that she herself had no temptation; but the warning put a stop to the confidences.

The Repton dog-cart always conveyed Miss Repton and her governess to and fro, and one fine February afternoon when Miss Molyneux and Miss Hesketh were waiting with their girls for the arrival of their respective carriages, it dashed up to the door of the Talbot with three gentlemen. The young German was handed

to the vacant back-seat with more lively familiarity than respect, and her pupil as bodkin. Her manner was scared and uneasy, and though Winny nodded to her from the window, she seemed too pre-occupied to notice anything.

Miss Molyneux said to Winny: 'I tremble for that poor, silly girl! Lady Repton takes no sort of care of her, and she brought her from Germany only last summer. She will get into a scrape, and she was not meant to be bad, I am sure.'

Winny Hesketh's heart stood still for pity and terror when she heard the next news of her. She never came again to the dancing-school, and little Miss Repton appeared in charge of an elderly, ascetic Scotchwoman. The Lady Repton loudly proclaimed that she would have no more foreigners about her child —for who would have thought it? that German girl—a pastor's daughter, too—who was so soft-eyed and sweet-spoken, who sang so seraphically, and looked so innocent, had turned out —*a thief! a thief!* Positively! Trinkets had

been missed from time to time, a diamond clasp, a ruby ring had disappeared, and would it be credited, that miserable little traitress had stolen them? had stolen them—and for what? To buy her fantastic costumes to act in, and ribbons and gauds to make a show in the drawing-room amongst the ladies and gentlemen!

The Lady Repton had her say uncontradicted until the Norminster assizes came on, and the poor pastor of Hesse's daughter was put upon her trial. She was convicted, she was punished. But the Lady Repton received from the judge the severest reprimand that ever a witness had received from the bench in that court.

Winny Hesketh asked Miss Molyneux what would become of Gretchen.

'Oh, my dear, I cannot tell you—with a pretty face, and a beautiful voice, and no character, and idleness and a taste for pleasure, I am afraid there is very little doubt what will become of her,' said the woman who had fifty-seven years' experience of the world. 'There

are perils in this state of life, you see,' she went on, 'and temptations for poor, weak, attractive girls. Girls ought to keep fast hold on whatever they have been taught that is good. Not that they will escape trial even then, but when they walk blindly they may be kept from falling, if it be their habit to rest upon a strength other than their own. Read your Bible, my dear, and remember your prayers.'

Winny Hesketh did not tell that wretched episode of Gretchen to her mother. Mrs Hesketh never heard it. Already her anxious turn of mind was apt to create for her too many forebodings. Winny had often to find verbal confidence for both as regarded her future. It seemed as if the widow, having practised to make her daughter as independent as her son, had come to a late knowledge that, after all, a girl is not a boy, nor designed by nature to be thrown entirely at liberty. Winny had profited almost too much by the maxims instilled into her memory. She had all the fearlessness of ignorance, and professed to make

light of men, and to repudiate the pleasing vanities of her sex. She was nearly twenty years old, and had never fancied herself in love, or in the least danger of love. This statement she volunteered with a laughing, light-hearted satisfaction to Delphine Mercier, on receiving from that practical young woman an intimation that she, Delphine, had a suitor, that she was engaged to marry, and intended to marry without long delay. She there and then bespoke Winny for her bridesmaid, and asked if she might bring her dear Joe to Castle Green to be introduced. Also she predicted to Winny that, sooner or later, love would find out the way to the vulnerable spot in her own proud little heart—and she wished it might be soon, for the sake of sympathy.

CHAPTER XIV.

DELPHINE MERCIER'S JOE.

THIS was at midsummer. Miss Hesketh had asked and obtained a six weeks' holiday from Hall Green, the first fortnight of which she was spending at home, devoting a portion of her leisure hours to preparations for the long-desired and long-deferred visit to her friend Mildred Hutton, to which her mother had, at last, consented. Miss Dalby lived on Castle Green, giving a chief hand in these preparations. She sat in the dull back-parlour, sewing all day long. She made up as a Sunday best dress that lead-coloured silk, Aunt Agnes's premature Christmas gift to her niece, which had reposed so long in the yellow chest; and she made up a Swiss muslin with Stuart tartan ribbons, and a pink and white striped Urlstone gingham, the ribbons and the gingham

being gifts respectively from Mr and Mrs Broome on their return from a tour in Scotland. And last of all she made up a dress concerning which Winny's sentimental mind was much exercised. One morning, when she was running a seam, and listening to Miss Dalby's annals of the poor amongst whom her lot was cast, the widow Hesketh entered, bearing in her hands a parcel, the features of which Winny knew well.

She laid it upon the table, and opened out her wedding-dress and pelisse. 'The two together will be enough—you are not taller than your mother was, Winny,' said she, displaying the narrow skirts—the skirt of the pelisse lined with white silk of which the purity was a little tarnished, and the under skirt trimmed with three rows of lace.

Winny blushed with pleased surprise. She did not admire the notion of appropriating these wedding-clothes, but what a pretty, pretty dress they would make! And perfectly to her taste. The silk was rich and soft, the ground-colour a delicate silver-grey, and the minute

pattern with which it was figured over traced in white. Miss Dalby said it was beautiful, and could never be old-fashioned. 'But I don't half like to take it in pieces, mother,' said Winny, wistful, regretful.

'Nonsense, child! What is the good of letting it lie useless? There are specks of mildew on one cuff of the pelisse—I hope it does not go any further,' and the widow proceeded to a careful examination. Other blemishes there were none, and after brief deliberation Winny was set to unmake those robes that had been made with quite other hopes than hers.

It was exquisite neat work, and required patience to undo. 'Be careful with the lace, Winny,' said her mother. 'You may have of it what will make you a bertha, but don't cut it at random. It is very fine Mechlin.'

'How grand I shall be!' Winny answered, laughing. That was her way. She pretended not to care, but, in fact, she was fond of the niceties of dress, and was remiss in no item of personal cultivation; her frills were crisp

and snowy always, and her shoes and gloves revealed distinct feminine weakness.

In the midst of her suggestive employment appeared Delphine Mercier, bringing two books in her hand. 'These are the two books Joe gave me: "Phantasmion" and "Vaughan's Poems"—look into them, Winny, and you will get an idea of what he is from the reading he wishes me to like. We shall come at six,' said she, and was gone again on her busy way to some class.

Joe's introduction was to be celebrated that evening by a high tea on Castle Green. Mrs Hesketh had given a rather inhospitable, reluctant consent to his invitation. For was he not a lover? Not Winny's, it is true, but Delphine's, which was next door to it, and might put emulous, imitative fancies into Winny's head. However, the young folks' minds were set on it, and the risk must be run.

Winny took her walk, and made the parlour put on its company aspect with a few flowers from Nanny Anson's garden, in the vine-leaf;

and at five o'clock she sat down to con Joe's gift-books. When she had seen Joe she came to the conclusion that Delphine was unconsciously responsible for his choice. Punctual to six o'clock they arrived; Delphine in a neat stone-coloured alpaca, and Joe in speckled cotton gloves. Mrs Hesketh was solemn as became the occasion; Winny was in her playful humour, and her mother said to her once: 'Don't laugh so, Winny—what is there to laugh at?' There was a self-evident cause at the moment, but the real cause of Winny's mirth lay deeper. She was secretly merry over Delphine's Joe, wondering how Delphine had ever idealised him into a lover—such a heavy, red-faced young man! Perhaps Delphine had not idealised him at all, but loved him simply for what he was. She talked for the twain. He sat behind the table, and it seemed more than once as if the girls in the bow-window had forgotten that he was there. Mrs Hesketh took her knitting, and was observant in silence.

But Delphine was sincerely desirous of

Winny's suffrages in Joe's favour, and calling him presently to her support, she proceeded to lay open their plans for the future, when they should be married. Joe was a nephew of Mrs Mason, and had been hitherto employed as a bookseller's assistant, but had relinquished his employment for some reason not stated. Delphine recounted how he had tried to get the appointment of librarian at the Cotham Town Library and had failed; and they had decided since to give joint lessons—she, in languages as at present, and he, lessons in writing and arithmetic. Together she believed that they would be able to make a very good thing of their teaching. Winny confessed that she did not see why not. Mrs Hesketh said nothing.

'Of course, we should prefer to stay in Cotham, where my connection is so valuable, but Joe's sisters, who are taking Mrs Mason's old school, object. So we think of settling in Hull,' Delphine said with diffident reluctance.

At this Mrs Hesketh's face was emphatic of discouragement, and Winny said with almost

peremptory disapproval: 'But that would be very foolish, to throw away a living already assured to begin anew in a strange place. Why do the Miss Masons object to your staying in Cotham? Indeed, but I think you should practise a judicious selfishness.'

'I do not know why they object, but they *do* object. And it would be a pity to begin with any unpleasantness.'

Winny was on the point of appealing to Joe, but having looked at him, she checked herself. He was listening with tame acquiescence. 'I shall be sorry if you go away from Cotham,' she said, and refrained from further counsel.

The engaged couple took their leave at eight o'clock that they might enjoy a walk by the river before Delphine went home. Winny stood at the window as they slowly crossed the green, and remarked when they were lost to sight: 'I hope Delphine will be the happier for her dear Joe, but he is a lymphatic personage.'

'Don't use such strange words, Winny—

lymphatic—what do you mean? If anything ails him it is idleness,' said her mother in a severe tone. 'It is clear to me that Delphine Mercier will have to keep two people instead of one when she is married—and who can tell how many more? I should not like to see you follow her example.'

'No fear, mother! A wilderness of Joes shall not tempt me,' cried Winny, and she laughed with uncontrollable fun.

Mrs Hesketh's gravity was intensified rather than otherwise. 'I don't believe, Winny, that you know what you are laughing at,' she said. 'To me it appears a crying matter.'

But Winny's senseless mirth provoked none but its own proper tears.

CHAPTER XV.

FRESH SCENES AND PASTURES NEW.

It was towards six o'clock in the evening of a sumptuous July day, after the fervent heat and glow were abated, that Mildred Hutton walked out into the garden, to wait and watch for the coming of her friend Winifred Hesketh. Somebody had said that the young lady could not arrive much before seven, but Mildred's impatience was less devouring when she was in movement, and there was no lack of company in the garden. Her mother was there, moving from rose-bush to rose-bush with an eye of serene contemplation in the cool of the day. Her brother was there, lounging under the window where his young wife sat at her perennial work-basket; and four children were there, tumbling on the grass in various, progressive stages of short-coated boy-baby-hood.

They were in everybody's charge, and everybody took a turn at leaving them to themselves, a wholesome neglect which each improved in his own artless way. Besides these, there were the dogs, Wiffle, Trump, and Snap.

It was a pretty pastoral enough. In the background the shingle-roofed farm-house, with a stone porch and a chamber over, with big chimney-stacks and windows wider than they were high. In the foreground the green lawn animated by those figures, a lawn not much deeper than the house, and enclosed by a dwarf wall, which was hidden on the one hand by a fine spreading walnut-tree, with a rustic seat round its bole, and on the other by shrubs, and an arcade of pillar roses that led to the garden-gate. The two families lived together. That was the custom of the Huttons. The farm was Mrs Hutton's for her life. The mother was not ousted to make room for a younger generation until death took her; but the son who was heir brought his wife home to her, and they made one household. The present young wife was a daughter of the

rector of Cranby, the next parish but one. And Mildred was the only daughter of her mother left unmarried.

It was early in the morning of that beautiful day when Winny Hesketh left Cotham to come to Foston-under-Wold—that was the name of Mildred Hutton's village—her home was called The House. Winny travelled for three hours outside the coach, passing on the road Holworth Grange and the Mill and Repton House, beyond which she got into an unknown country—a country of wide pasture-fields and corn-fields, of small plantations, and close-cut hedgerows, which gradually swelled into long rounded hills, and wooded scaurs and ridges, that circumscribed the prospect but added to its picturesqueness. Soon after twelve the coach stopped at Lownde, the nearest market-town to Foston, and here in the market-place, at the Bull Inn, the young traveller descended. In this best inn's best room she waited till four o'clock, fed by the landlady with sherry and biscuits, and occupying her vacancy by looking alternately at a

fine, coloured series of Morland's pigs, and out of one window after another at the absence of passers-by. Castle Green was a fair to Lownde market-place every day but Saturday.

At four o'clock the phaeton from Foston was announced, with the additional information that when the grey mare had bated half an hour she would be ready to start again. But it was five in this leisurely country before she got under weigh, what with Bob's errands to do, and parcels to wait for. Bob was a groom in a drab coat and gaiters, an old fellow who was not to be hurried any more than the grey mare. He took a shrewd glint out of his eye-corner at the young lady he was going to drive to Foston, and feeling in his red waistcoat pocket, handed her a document, odorous of tobacco—

'That's t'explain—a no'at from Miss Mildred that she charged me to give yo',' he said; and having ascertained that the luggage was securely placed, he mounted to his seat and shook the reins, and the grey mare trotted off at a better pace than her appearance had

promised. Winny read her note. Mildred mentioned an accidental delay in Bob's setting out to Lownde, and said that she should have come herself to meet her, but there was a parting guest to speed on his way, and with his portmanteau and a saddle of her brother's to go to the saddler's, there was no room for her in the phaeton. Winny's spirits, damped by the solitude of the strange inn, revived again, and she was happy.

It was seven miles to Foston, and stoppages on the road lengthened it to the time of ten. There was to call at Cranby Rectory for an answer to a message left there in the morning, and there was a dispute about nails at the 'Shop. Winny took it all comfortably—she was drawing very near to Mildred now. But first the phaeton overtook a gentleman of middle height and lean athletic frame, with a thin brown cheek, and a brown beard, bright eyes, and a cigar in his mouth.

'Going to the House, Mr Durant, sir?' asked Bob quite friendly.

'Yes—but you cannot give me a lift—never

mind, go on,' he replied, glancing at the young lady's bonnet sideways—a bonnet hid a face in those days—and then at the encumbered back-seat.

'Tek the reins, sir, I'll gie 'em yo' wi' pleasure,' urged the obliging Bob. 'I hev to go to Marrishes afore dark, and Sims he'll supper up t'auld mear when yo' git her whoam.'

'Very good,' said Mr Durant. And nothing loth, he tossed his cigar over the hedge, and took the seat that Bob had vacated. For a moment the bright eyes under the cottage bonnet met the bright eyes under the grey felt hat; the gentleman dumbly bowed, the lady as dumbly bowed again, and ten minutes later the grey mare brought them to a stand at the garden-door.

There Mildred Hutton met her friend. 'O you dear child, I thought you were never coming! How tired you must be of waiting at the inn!' cried she, and folded Winny in her arms with loving kisses.

Winny's face glowed with pleasure. 'I am not tired. It has been a beautiful journey—

you are taller than ever, Mildred! Stoop down that I may kiss you again.' Mr Durant nodded to Mildred over Winny's head, and drove round to the stable.

In the porch was Mildred's mother, much like Mildred herself, in a widow's cap, waiting to add her welcome, and coming from the drawing-room, with a little boy by the hand, was her brother's wife. They were kind and cordial. Winny liked her reception, and with a warning that tea would be ready before they were, the girls went upstairs together.

Winny was to share Mildred's room, of course, else where would have been their confidences—those blameless delights of girlish friendship? Winny was ever softly deliberate in her movements. 'Let me take my time, and I shall have the sooner done,' said she, in reply to Mildred's exhortation to make haste. There she stood in her petticoats, shaking down and re-coiling the treasure of her hair, which was dark in the shadows, and auburn where its ripples caught the sun. Mildred began to laugh, and laughed with an enjoying,

foolish mirthfulness. 'What at?' Winny begged to know.

'At you, at you, my dear!' cried her friend. 'Remember, I have not seen you in your petticoats since I left the old school, and you are all curves where you used to be angles. Here's a dimple in your little back' —Mildred stooped to kiss it—'and your bonny arms are as round as baby's!' Winny turned to see her dimples in the glass. 'And the shell of an ear, and the pretty, proud chin, and the naughty, naughty lip that curls, and says such savage things'—kissing her again. Mildred was inclined to fondle her all over, she loved her so tenderly,—was herself so caressing, so affectionate.

'At this rate, I shall never be dressed,' said Winny with an air of suffering patience and reasonableness.

Mildred sat down again and watched the completion of her friend's toilette. Winny put on the wedding-silk—Mildred was in dove-coloured silk. The fashion for girls at that period was a modest simplicity. They wore

their own hair only, with a silver pin in the knot at the back, or a silver arrow, and a braid twisted above the ear, and falling behind it in a wavy curl. Their evening dress had a plain skirt rather long, an open sleeve rather short, and a boddice folded open, leaving the round young throat bare above white softnesses of frill and tucker, except for the gleam of a gold necklet or the contrast of a velvet-band clasped with a jewel. Mrs Hesketh had made over to Winny all the few trinkets she possessed, and Winny wore her mother's pearl ring to-night, and fastened her black velvet with a little oval brooch and pendant locket, composed of an amethyst and rows of seed pearls.

'You are a perfect darling, Winny! I wonder whether you have any notion how pretty you are?' Mildred said contemplating her with a sort of feminine rapture.

Winny's eyes softened and sweetened, but she said quite coolly: 'Oh yes! I am not imposing, but I call myself nicely finished.'

'Nicely finished, indeed! That's a new

descriptive term—is it the way you speak of your heroines? When is our book to be written that we planned together, Winny—eh?' They were on their descent downstairs now, Winny tucked under Mildred's arm in the old Manor School style, and feeling quite at home there.

'O Mildred, I have nearly completed a tale—*long*, long enough for a whole volume—I get up at five o'clock at Hall Green, and so I have an hour before the children are ready—lessons begin at seven. I've brought it', Winny whispered, all at once becoming serious, earnest, impressive, and comic.

'We will read it up in my room to-morrow,' said Mildred confidential in her turn. 'And I have made a song—a song that will sing—I have made the melody too. You shall hear it.'

They were now at the drawing-room door, and Winny, released from her friend's embrace, trimmed herself straight, and entered first. There was a hubbub of laughter and conversation in the room—Mr Hutton laying down the

law, Mr Melhuish, the vicar, propounding a contrary argument, and emphasising it with one forefinger on the other palm; Mr Durant lying back in an easy chair, gazing at the ceiling, Mrs Hutton the elder listening perplexed, Mrs Hutton the younger listening amused.

A sudden silence fell. Mr Hutton jumped up, and greeted the visitor with hospitable warmth, Mr Melhuish shook hands with Mildred, and bowed to her introduction of her friend. Mr Durant withdrew his eyes from the ceiling, and turned them on the young stranger with an amiable fastidious scrutiny. 'She is a little lady,' was his private reflection. Then everybody went to tea—to supper—whatever you please to call it—not dinner: the family at the farm dined punctually at one o'clock.

Winny sat between Mr Durant and her host, and Mildred had Mr Melhuish very attentive between her and her sister-in-law. Mr Melhuish was a cheerful young country pastor, with a strong voice and a loud laugh, and an early pledge of clerical rotundity in a double chin and prominent waistcoat. Mr Hutton was a

farmer who farmed his own land to a profit, and understood his business thoroughly. He kept his hunter, took out his shooting-licence, and lived in all respects as the smaller landed gentry live, to which fast diminishing rank the Huttons of Foston-under-Wold belonged.

The ladies of the family talked but little: Mr Melhuish and Mr Hutton were still the chief speakers. Winny was glad of her chicken-wing and cup of tea. Mr Durant close by her, drank claret instead, and Mr Melhuish did likewise. They were not invited guests, but chance guests — very frequent ones. There were no formal parties at the House, but there was plenty of hospitality. Both these gentlemen lived as bachelors, and had a general permission to drop in and share whatever was going. There was always something going as succulent as a solitary dinner, and Mr Melhuish especially preferred what he called pot-luck to his cenobite's meal. Mr Durant commonly dined at home, and strolled to the House with his after-dinner cigar, and back again, by way of passing the evening, but to-day Mr Hutton

had bidden him come at seven, for Mildred's clever friend was coming, and they should want somebody to talk to her. Yes, Winny had been spoken of beforehand as 'Mildred's clever friend,' and almost a prejudice created; but as she showed her wit to-night mostly by her silence, her reputation for cleverness was not remembered against her any more. If Durant had come on pretence of talking it was a sheer pretence; for he was almost as silent as his neighbour, and he went away early—did not stay many minutes in the drawing-room after tea.

But the pastor lingered. He was too, too plainly in the presence where he would ever be; and when Mildred, at his humble request, opened the piano, and sang him a song, the expression of his jolly face was that of a man in sweetest clover. Ten o'clock struck by the clock in the hall, and still he lingered. Young Mrs Hutton excused herself on the plea of a little voice in the nursery, and vanished; old Mrs Hutton folded up her knitting, and remarked to Winny that she ought to rest well

after her long journey, and Mildred closed the piano; but, still he did not go. Not until Mr Hutton yawned, and mentioned the necessity of being early in the morning to ride to Lownde market, did he say that he thought it must be almost time to shut up. Nobody asked him to stay a little longer. He went, and Mildred laughed at him; for which her mother rebuked her, and her brother observed that Melhuish was becoming a bit of a bore, and he wished he would take himself off at ten, if he must needs come so often.

'He is gone, at last, and now, Winny dear, we'll go; for by your eyes you are sleepy,' said Mildred gaily.

'Good-night, girls—don't talk till the small hours,' said Mr Hutton, and his mother repeated the admonition more gravely.

But what was the use of it? The friends had not met for over a year, and their drowsy eyes were still open and their tongues busy when the clock in the hall tolled one. Then they made a strong resolution to talk no more, and except for Mildred saying: 'Winny, are

you asleep yet? I just want to tell you'— they kept it; for Winny did not answer. She was accustomed to sleep her very best, as a matter of duty to her work next morning, and she was already lost in the downy oblivion of slumber.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE WALLED GARDEN.

THE interminable quality of feminine confidences may well be a wonder to men. It was not ten o'clock when Mildred Hutton carried Winny off under her arm to walk in the walled garden—a fruit garden apart from the house—and they were walking there still when the bell rang that gave warning of dinner —three mortal hours of unceasing talk, and for one word of Winny's, one thousand of Mildred's. Winny had, indeed, no story to tell, and Mildred had two.

There was a commodious arbour in that garden, and there they entered for a space while Mildred showed Winny one of those libels on the human face divine that passed current as portraits in the nonage of photography. Winny studied it profoundly. 'I

should say it was a fine face—a good face,' was her opinion delivered with brevity and assurance.

'It is a beautiful face,' said Mildred, and took the libel into her hand tenderly. 'Poor Frank! When shall I see him again? Shall I ever see him again, Winny?'

'You don't write—you never hear of each other except through third persons—and you have not met since you exchanged rings two years ago.' Winny was only reciting the heads of Mildred's confession reflectively. After a considerable pause, she asked: 'You love him?'

'Dearly, *dearly*,' said Mildred, and that was the text of all that came after. She rose up suddenly, and took Winny into her embrace; and round, and round, and round they went, monotonous miles round that walled garden, discoursing of poor Frank, his home, his father and mother, his brothers and sisters, friends and connections, and all about him.

Winny speculated once whether he amused himself this while, and if he did, how?

'Because,' added she, 'I am thinking of that Mr Melhuish.'

Mildred coloured, and laughed a little. 'My mother encourages him. I don't—indeed, Winny, *I don't*,' she asseverated. 'But if Frank and I are to be parted, he would be as good as another. I am not like you; I should be a miserably discontented woman if I had to live solitary. And they all think Melhuish a kind fellow.'

This sounded dreadful to Winny—shocking. She stood still, and looked at her friend, amazed, incoherent. 'I should call that almost as bad as the seventh commandment — to marry Mr Melhuish, while you can say of Frank that you love him "dearly, *dearly*."'

Mildred made no answer, she only walked a little faster—to break out presently in another strain. 'You know nothing about it, Winny! You have such fine theoretical notions. I should never be astonished to hear that *you* had fallen in love perversely.'

'Don't predict me such a calamity, Mildred,' expostulated Winny, laughing but rueful. 'Idle

words of that sort have a way of bringing themselves to pass. There's my brother Dick—one day, in a pet, uncle Hayland told him that the men of our family never did any good, and when Dick wants an excuse for his laziness, and the scrapes it gets him into, he quotes his uncle, and asks, how can he help it?'

'I did not mean to be unkind!' Mildred took her companion's face between her two hands with repentant affection. 'But you have that look in your eyes, Winny. If you fancy there is nothing in love but what you can foresee and control, some day, to your sorrow, you'll find out your mistake.'

'No woman can cheat her fate,' Winny rejoined. 'It is just because I believe your love for Frank to be true, strong and permanent, that I protest against Mr Melhuish. I put myself, in imagination, in your place.'

Winny could not quite do that. She saw Mildred's natural sweetness strangely thwarted, thoughts of herself ever uppermost, an irritable restless humour urging her to constant change and excitement. She sought for peace in a

vast effusion of reminiscences, but found only a more feverish impatience. She was sometimes very unhappy, very uneasy; one hour dull and melancholy, the next nettlesome and perplexing. Her sister-in-law was long since tired with hearing her, and the whole family would have rejoiced if the jovial and comfortable vicar could have effected a diversion of her love-sick mind in his own favour. Young Mrs Hutton quickly discerned that Mildred's friend was not throwing the weight of her influence into that scale, but the contrary, and set her down as a romantic young woman—and when a happy matron, the mother of four boys, calls a young virgin romantic, she means her anything rather than a compliment.

The day lagged somewhat after dinner, but the house could never be oppressively quiet with those active little children in it, and Winny amused the two who were not at *siesta*. Mildred, moody, exhausted and silent, sat sewing until four o'clock, when she abruptly proposed to walk along the road to meet her brother, returning from Lownde.

'You will find it dusty, and very hot yet,' said her mother in a voice of remonstrance; but Mildred only said: 'Come, Winny,' as if impatient of a check, and Winny submissively went.

It was, indeed, the hottest hour of the day, and the summer dust lay deep, and white as lime upon the road; but Mildred plunged afresh into her sea of troubles, and knew nothing but that its waves were running almost over her head.

'Sometimes I think I shall go mad,' said she vehemently. 'O Winny, can you not comfort me with your cool reason?'

'What was your last news of him, and how old is it?' Winny inquired.

'On the tenth of May, I heard of him. Miss Cradock was at Norminster, and met him in the street—you know Miss Cradock lives at Lownde, and we stayed at his father's house together the first time I was there. She is rich, and if Frank had chosen her instead of me, that would have pleased them all. But he did not.'

'Did he send you any message?'

'He said there was no change at home—I understood what he meant me to know by that. He is in as much subjection to his parents as a young Frenchman. Old Madame, his grandmother, is French, and from her the whole household takes its tone. Such a tiny despot, Winny, and she objected to my great size.' Mildred could not help a laugh at this recollection, and Winny contrived to keep the talk at that level.

'There is the post—what prevents him writing? He cannot be kept in leading-strings for ever,' she said.

'Have I not told you? My mother is proud, and she made me promise that I would neither receive his letters nor write to him until I am of age. I am not so penniless as they imagine. I shall have four hundred pounds a year of my own the day I am one-and-twenty. And that is only six weeks off—my birthday is in September.'

'O Mildred, live in hope! I don't see any lawful impediment that can hinder your happi-

ness if he be constant. Let the French grandmother hear that you have a comfortable *dot*—the *dot* goes for very much in French marriages.'

'It is the first consideration. I never told Frank that I should have any money—I never gave it a thought, nor he either probably. And when my want of it was made an objection my mother forbade me to tell him'——

'Somebody else may have told him. The time draws near when he must assert his own will or give you your release—that is why you are disquieted—I think I'll trust him. I like his face in his portrait'—Winny looked wicked.

'There you go, Winny, making sport of us! I know you are laughing at what you call my exaggerations. I wish I had a glass to show you the curl of your lip at this minute.' Mildred seemed to rail, but she was pleased. She brightened altogether, became oblivious of length and distance, and went on and on until Winny, ready to drop with fatigue, spied a stile by the road, and asked if they had not better rest.

The stile was in the shadow of the bushy hedge-row, and Winny stepping over it, they perched on the top-bar facing one another, and Mildred remarked with apparent surprise, that they had come over two miles, and that they would have to walk back the same way. While between the hedges the country had been hidden from view, but now Winny had a fine prospect at her feet—in the foreground a great field of wheat, ripening to the harvest; in the middle-distance a picturesque tiled house in a garden, from the gateway of which a broken avenue of yew-trees stretched across pastures full of cattle to the parish church of Rushmead, the next village to Foston. The back-ground was of woods and distant hills. The westering sun glittered in the upper windows of the house which had five gables in front, three on one side of the porch, and two on the other. It was admirably constructed to retain the dusky shadows towards evening, and won Winny's artistic eye in an instant.

'Do you ever sketch now, Mildred? I

must have a drawing of that house in the valley. Who lives there?' she asked.

'Oh, that is Rushmead Old Hall, Durant's house—my brother farms his land. It is really very pretty when you are near it, and well kept, though he is not much there,' Mildred said unconcernedly. 'I have given up my sketching, but you shall go some day.'

Winny Hesketh felt a curiosity about Mr Durant, and it was consonant with her speculations that he should be the master of that ancient and lonely house in the fields. She did not ask any questions, but Mildred being in the vein, with very slight encouragement went on to talk of him, and Winny listened with an interest that grew by indulgence.

'Leonard Durant was destined for holy orders, but he did like the prodigal son in the parable—he asked his father to give him the portion that fell to him, and went ranging about the world instead of going into the Church. I don't mean that he was wild, but he was an enterprising young fellow, and could not resign

himself to a quiet life. He was the third son when he left home, but when he came back there was no one to welcome him—only the empty house. His father and his two brothers had died in his absence, and Rushmead was his. The neighbours tried to clip his wings, and keep him there, but in less than six months he tired of it; so my brother took the land, and he was soon off again. He is an incorrigible vagabond now, but such a pleasant, generous man—we all like Leonard Durant at our house. He is a prime favourite with my mother. She would have liked him for a son-in-law once upon a time—before my sister Kate was married to Merlewood.'

Winny was not astonished to hear that. Mr Durant seemed to her a man to be universally a favourite.

While Mildred was still speaking there was the sound of a horse upon the road. The rider appeared in sight, and it was Mr Hutton. He reined up when he saw the girls, and asked how they came to be there—adding without pause for explanation: 'Don't let Mildred walk

you off your feet, Miss Hesketh—she is apt to forget that a little pony cannot trot so fast and far as a tall horse without distress. The visitation is at Rockbro' next week, Milly—I shall have to go with Melhuish. It would be a nice outing for you girls if Miss Hesketh has not seen Rockbro'. I'll speak to my mother if you would both like it.'

Mildred would like it extremely. Winny had not seen Rockbro', and would like it too. 'Fanny will go to look after you—Fanny is my wife, Miss Hesketh. We will put up at the Crown, and make two days of it. If you intend to come home to tea, it is time you were moving—you will not be waited for.' With this warning admonition Mr Hutton cantered off.

The girls immediately set their faces towards the House, and walked apace, yet not so fast but that Mildred had breath to tell how it was at Rockbro' she had parted last from Frank, and how it was from friends of his there she had her most direct intelligence of him.

Mr Hutton chose a propitious moment for speaking to his mother—on Sunday afternoon in the walled garden, whither they had all adjourned for dessert and child-play in the arbour. Mr Durant was there. He had just stepped over to see how they were getting on at the House (his custom often of a Sunday afternoon) and when Mr Hutton had won his mother's consent (a visibly reluctant consent with regard to her daughter), he turned to his neighbour, and said: 'You had better come with us, Durant—make one more of our party. The more, the merrier.'

Durant seemed to debate with himself the pros and cons. At length he answered: 'I don't care if I do. But Jem has lamed my brown horse, and how am I to get there? You will all ride, of course.'

'Yes. Fanny would hardly go else, nor Mildred either, I suspect. That is half the fun of the expedition—to cross the wolds, and have their horses at Rockbro'. But there is Miss Hesketh, by the by—do you ride, Miss Hesketh?'

Winny blushed, ashamed of her utter in-

capacity, but confessed that she never rode in her life.

'Then I'll drive Miss Hesketh in the phaeton —the grey mare can do the distance?' said Mr Durant.

'Yes, she can do it easily,' Mr Hutton replied. 'But we will find you a mount, Durant. There is the bay colt, if you like!'

Then Mrs Hutton suggested that Bob could be spared to drive Miss Hesketh, and their bags and boxes; and he would be useful also at Rockbro' with the horses. Mr Hutton said 'Yes—perhaps that would be the best arrangement.'

'It will be rather dull work for my dear little Winny,' whispered Mildred, pouting and caressing her.

Winny looked up in Mildred's face with sweet eyes, and answered despotically: 'No, it won't! If Bob is not surly, I am not proud. I shall make him talk; and tell me wold-country stories.'

Durant was observing her. She was rosy, eager and shy; she wanted to be in nobody's

way. He was a warm-hearted, impulsive person, and thought it a pity the little thing should not have her pleasure like the rest. And in that sentiment he spoke. 'I'll be your friend's escort, Miss Mildred, if she will allow me. I'll try to be as good company as Bob, Miss Hesketh. I know the wold-country stories, too.'

It was then taken for settled. Mildred was sorry that Winny would not have the exhilaration of the beautiful ride by the bridle-track over the wolds—the phaeton must follow the road, of course. But Winny bade her not spoil her own enjoyment by any regret; for she was sure the drive would be beautiful too, and an immense treat to her.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN OUTING FOR THE GIRLS.

THE night before the proposed expedition to Rockbro' when the girls went up to bed, Mildred stopped at the stair-case window, and said: 'Listen to the rain, Winny—and that's thunder. What a pity if we cannot go to-morrow!'

A pity, indeed! Nevertheless, with the buoyant confidence of hopeful youth, they proceeded to pack their best bonnets and pretty evening silk dresses for the *table-d'hôte* at the Crown, and a variety of other matters not very likely to be called into requisition, but desirable to have in case of need. Winny's feeling was that providence could not be so unkind as to disappoint them of their innocent frolic—a brief, intense pleasure for these country girls, to be considered in proportion to the general dulness

of their bucolic lives. And Winny's trust in the good-will of providence was not misplaced. She opened her eyes at four o'clock in the morning, rose, and looked out. The dawn was clear, the air fresh, the summer trees, long athirst, were glittering still with the abundance of rain; the far-seen, winding road had lost its lime-white glare, and was cool, moist brown—the July dust was thoroughly laid, and the storm of last night had most opportunely prepared them a day of ten thousand.

Mr Hutton came downstairs smart as a bridegroom, with a flower in his button-hole, and a new blue tie. Mr Melhuish, invited to come to breakfast, did not fail, and everybody wore a festive countenance. It had been agreed that Bob should drive Miss Hesketh to Rushmead, which was all on the way to Rockbro,' to pick up Mr Durant, but when the phaeton was brought round to the garden door at the House, Durant was there—he was ready, and thought he might as well walk over as wait, kicking his heels at the church corner.

The phaeton was to have an hour's start of

the riders, but Mildred promised her friend that they would be at the Crown first; because the drive by the road was longer than the bridle-path across the wolds, and the grey mare would want a longer bait mid-way the journey. Mildred, in her riding-habit, was a new sight to Winny, and she became it admirably. Winny herself, in a brown dunstable bonnet trimmed with three shades of brown ribbon, a white net quilling under, and a blue pent-house, technically called an 'ugly,' over, to save her eyes and complexion from the sun, had an air of extreme seclusion; and when Mrs Hutton the elder had seen her scrupulously enveloped in a drab dust cloak, for the preservation of her fawn carmelite dress, anybody meeting the phaeton upon the road might have asked Mr Durant what old woman he had got there. That, however, could not prevent Winny's eyes shining with a clear lustre or her cheeks blushing like roses —she had such a happy face when she was happy, an expression that created a sympathy.

As they drove off, Mr Hutton with gay good-humour cried after them: 'Take care of

her, Durant; don't upset her! I daresay she is precious to somebody!'

'Or will be!' replied Durant in the same vein, throwing a glance behind him.

Winny looked back too—at Mildred bare-headed, shading her eyes from the sun, at Wiffle, just let loose, jumping up with exuberant morning greeting to his master, at the biggest of the little boys carefully dipping his polished shoe in a pool that the rain had left. They all turned into the garden.

'I like your young friend, Milly; she is a nice, bright little girl,' Mr Hutton said, and he shut the garden-door. He was denying in his own private mind the accusation thrown out against Winny by his wife — that she was romantic.

'I knew she was nice, or I should not have wished to bring her here,' replied Mildred cheerfully, and then she hurried indoors to finish her toilette, not to be to wait for when the horses were at the door. She had earned the character of lag-last, the dilatory member of the household, since her late troubles.

Mr Durant was a man who appreciated an intelligent silence. When the grey mare, after a spurt at starting, bethought herself that she might have far to go, and fell into her usual steady trot, he made the self-evident remark: 'Now we are off,' and Miss Hesketh's acquiescent 'Yes,' breathed in a voice of satisfaction, released him from further effort.

Winny had been accommodated with a cushion at her back and a cushion at her feet, that she might sit perfectly at ease, and when Durant looked down he could see her face calmly beaming, her lips a little apart, her eyes as restful as if there were nothing more in the world for her to desire. Her whole aspect and attitude plainly said: 'Don't trouble to entertain me. I am quite comfortable, thank you.' And Durant obeyed the intimation.

At Rushmead church-corner they exchanged another word: 'The rector is gone—there are the wheel-marks of his gig,' Durant said, pointing down the turn to the rectory-house, and Winny's monosyllable did duty again.

Presently after the gentleman inquired: 'Have you travelled at all, Miss Hesketh?'

'I have never been further from Cotham than I am now,' Winny replied, and then recollected herself, and added: 'Oh yes, I have been to Avranches in Normandy for a few months with my cousin Lucy Hayland and Madame Bouvier, her governess. We lived in the house of Doctor Bouvier, Madame's father.'

'And you went to the Mont St Michel, and visited the fortress-abbey, no doubt?'

'No. We never saw it nearer than across the sands. Madame did not make expeditions for us—we were children.'

'Are you fond of much change and variety?'

'No, I don't think I am—but I have not been tempted. I like to know every stone of a place as I know Cotham, and every tree and field and lane as I know the country about Hall Green.'

'You are the governess at Hall Green. That is a melancholy existence, is it not?'

'I don't find it so. I have plenty to do, and

the children are nice. I am within reach of home too, which is a great thing—I see my mother almost every week.'

These communications were succeeded by a relapse into silence which lasted until the grey mare brought them to Cranby. There the parsonage stood upon the road-side, and several ladies were clustered at the gate. They might have been a large family of sisters, but the one amongst them who was the mother of the rest, cried out: 'How do you do, Mr Durant? I suppose Fanny and the others are riding across the wold? Papa will fall in with them, we hope.'

Mr Durant echoed the hope, and said to the girls: 'You are none of you gone, then?' They shook their heads as who would reply: 'No such luck for *us!*' and pursued by a chorus of good-byes and unselfish good wishes for everybody's enjoyment at Rockbro', the travellers continued on their way.

'There is very little fun in the lives of girls,' Durant reflected with a pensive air.

'You appear to pity us? What a blessing

we don't feel our need of commiseration!' said Winny, quietly amused.

Durant glanced at her, taken rather aback, perhaps more by her tone than by her words. He recollected that she was called Mildred Hutton's clever friend, and rejoined accordingly: 'I admit that you look sufficiently contented, Miss Hesketh. The chief thing is an object in life.'

Winny was not used to give in her adhesion to impromptu general propositions, so she said nothing, but fell into a considering humour. An object in life—pray, what might that signify for independent persons of her sex? The object in life of most young women is to marry, and after that to guide their household, and bring up children honourably—but that was certainly not *her* object; her mother had instructed her too carefully of the unwisdom of it. To be a successful governess was something, but was that worthy of being called an object in life? Winny was inclined to think not.

'Have you cracked the nut, at last?' Durant

asked when her countenance gave signs of having reduced the problem to a conclusion.

He did not stay for her to reply, but began to talk of himself, of his own object in life, and how it had answered. All he said might have been proclaimed at Lownde market-cross, but to Winny it had the charm of a spontaneous confidential effusion. It is always interesting to hear men talk of themselves. In the first place they know more of that individual self than any other person knows; and if they make a more favourable estimate of their motives, principles, and desires than outsiders make, who can judge them only by their acts, their fruits, they reveal what they fain would have been, and perhaps, what they were meant to be. Durant talked pleasantly and shrewdly; he had gone out to see the world, and had seen it in all quarters. But Winny missed a link, missed the clue of what temper he had seen it in. She wanted to know why—why he had broken the thread of his life in England, where, he told her, at Cambridge, he had done 'fairly well,' and had come out fifth wrangler. He gave her

some amusing dètails of his knapsack journeys beyond the highways of travel, where his seeing the world had degenerated often into painful, shabby vagabondage. It did not appear that he had ever done any good, or had set any aim before him. To *see* was his object, and never to be satisfied with seeing was his success. And where his hearer could read between the lines of his talk, the residuum of his far and wide observation was the same dull sense of insufficiency and vanity that clogs more or less the wheels of all men's lives. It is not to be imagined that he lost in interest by this. On the contrary, the sub-acid flavour of his experience had a delightful piquancy for her mental palate. The touches of nature in his allusions to the past years revealed just so much of self-regret and self-pity as are consistent with a man's recognition that he has missed the happy hour of fortune by his own fault, and with just so much cynicism as betrays that while he is not reconciled to its escape, he distrusts fortune too deeply to hope that she will ever give him the chance of overtaking it again.

Winny listened with a very simple, quiet, undemonstrative manner. Her eyes had softened, but there was a touch of irony in her voice and look as she said: 'And you have done nothing—not so much as thrown your adventures into the shape of a book?'

'No—and I claim no credit for that. I have no turn for phrase-making.'

Another long spell of silence ensued, which brought them in sight of the square tower of Lownde church. As they drove into the town, Durant said: 'Now, Miss Hesketh, the question is, shall we bait here for an hour, or shall we go on three miles further, to Beilby-Steeple, and bait there?' Winny was ready to accede to either plan—to whichever he thought best. 'You have spent some hours contemplating Lownde market-place on a lay-day, I know — very well, then, we will go forward to Beilby. My rector has gone on, for I don't see his gig at the Bull. We shall catch him up, and be in time to eat our luncheon together.'

Beyond Lownde the country was more hilly

but more bare of wood, and Beilby-Steeple crowned one of the highest elevations, a landmark for twenty miles round on a clear day. The village was on the slope of the hill, and the roadside inn at the foot of it. The venerable gig of the rector of Rushmead was at the door, and his old black horse was being led to the stable. The rector himself was on the doorstep, and hailed the arrival of Durant with benignant cordiality. He was a large-framed man, careless in his dress, genial in his manner —one of those old-fashioned parsons who still preach the good, old family sermon, stuffed with sound doctrine, and charged with wholesome precept for daily practice. Durant and he often smoked a pipe together, and talked of Cambridge. Miss Hesketh was introduced to him as Miss Hutton's friend, on a visit at the House, and was then escorted by the landlady to a rustic parlour, where she could rest and be thankful pending the preparation of fried ham and eggs—the best, and very good too, that Beilby Inn could provide at so short a notice. The gentlemen paraded up and down on the

shady side of the way to straighten their legs, and only came in when they were called; and they did the same after lunch until their respective beasts were harnessed to start again. The grey mare did not any more lose sight of her neighbour the black horse until they reached Rockbro'; and then the clergyman stopped short in the outskirts of the town at a modest old red house, by the sign of the Shovel and Cross-keys, good-humouredly avowing that his purse was not company for the Crown.

Before the grey mare gained that fashionable modern caravansary, she had a terribly long and steep pull up hill. Durant got out of the phaeton, and walked, but he would not allow the young lady he was in charge of to fatigue herself, though she would willingly. The ascent lay landwards, and was covered with scrub and inconsiderable trees, oaks chiefly, which shut in the zigzag road and excluded all prospect until the plateau at the top was won, when there burst upon the view a magnificent expanse of sea and sky, of cliff and castle, of town and country. Winny Hesketh had seen

nothing so beautiful. It was between five and six o'clock, the hour of a July day when all is most lovely, under warm lights, and soft, suffused, lengthening shadows.

The Crown was the central building on the terrace. The promenade was gay with gay people, and about the portico of the hotel lounged a few visitors, apparently weary of staying out, but reluctant to go in. Neither Mr Hutton, however, nor any of the party who had ridden by the wold, were there, and when Durant inquired of the manager of the hotel whether they had arrived, he was told that they had not. Winny was rather dismayed, but Durant assured her they could not be long now. They meant to bait at Merlewood, the home of Mr Hutton's eldest married sister, and had no doubt let more time slip by than they ought. 'You had better go in, Miss Hesketh; the rooms are engaged, I know,' he concluded, and Winny went in.

There were several persons standing in the hall, and as Winny Hesketh passed through it, conducted by the manager, a young gentleman

of remarkable elegance, who had been observing her from the moment the phaeton drew up at the door, advanced a step or two diffidently towards her. Winny looked at him, and he looked at her with a perplexed, half-recognition. The gentleman spoke first: 'Are you Miss Winifred?' he asked in a low voice. 'Yes—are you *Frank?*' she echoed more softly still, and they laughed and blushed both of them, and shook hands quite friendly. 'Mildred is coming?' said he. 'Yes.'

In fact, Mildred was there already.

'Here they are, Miss Hesketh,' cried Durant, who had remained on the look-out; and she turned back to the door.

The young gentleman of remarkable elegance advanced intrepidly, and offered his help to Mildred to alight. They exchanged, perhaps, a dozen words, and their mutual understanding seemed perfect. 'Yes, we are all here—my father and mother and gran'ma, too,' everybody heard him tell her.

Mr Melhuish showed a very fallen countenance, indeed, for a minute, and Mr Hutton

received a round-eyed note of exclamation from his wife. But they both accorded a polite recognition to their sister's favoured lover, and behaved like reasonable, well-bred people of the world, though their astonishment was as unwelcome as it was complete. For it had been hoped that Mr Melhuish might turn this present opportunity to his advantage, and that Mildred might go home engaged to the vicar. Thus had her family proposed, but the little god who guides the tender affairs of young folks had otherwise disposed.

When Mildred and Winny were safe shut up in their room to dress for dinner, Winny begged to know how this meeting had come about: 'By arrangement, or by kind intervention of providence?' said she mischievously.

'By kind intervention of providence, you profane little person,' retorted Mildred; and sat down for a few blissful moments to return silent thanks for it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PLEASANT ENTERTAINMENT.

THE Crown Hotel maintained in the season a *table d'hôte* after the continental fashion. It was patronised chiefly by the wealthy members of provincial town society, who would take up their abode for several weeks at a time in the splendid apartments prepared to meet their views of comfort; and by a sprinkling of simple country people, to whom two days at the Crown was a dear morsel of pleasure, to be enjoyed once in a life, and talked of for ever.

There was a spacious drawing-room also open to all the guests in the hotel, with a balcony looking seawards; and here for ten minutes before the great bell sounded, Mildred Hutton enjoyed the presence of her lover. She had a sweet, gracious countenance, being

happy; the event of the last hour had transfigured her, and her tall, willowy stature drew every eye in admiration of her noble air as she passed through the room.

It happened that in the arrangements of the table the two families faced each other, and the French grandmother gave herself up to be as fascinating as it is the privilege of her sex and nation to be. She was a stout little woman of a most bird-like agility, with black eyes, a wide sallow visage, a disagreeable voice, and a rich propriety of taste in her attire. Her son was large, fair, handsome and thoroughly English, ruddy-cheeked, blue-eyed, and his curly hair at fifty silvered already —Mildred saw in him what her dear Frank would some day be. The mother was a gentle, pretty woman, not without shrewdness, and overflowing with deference to gran'ma. She manifested a real kindliness towards Mildred, but the French grandmother no more than formerly approved of the young lady in her heart, though the discovery that she would not be without *dot* had removed her only valid

objection. Her desire was that her elder grandson should perpetuate the French connection, but on her attempting to urge it with authority, he had rebelled, asserted his manhood, and his right to make his own choice, had got his father's consent to his engagement with Miss Hutton, and the promise of a certain share in the business to support a separate establishment on his marriage—for this young Mr Jarvis (let him have his surname now) well knew that Mildred Hutton would never agree to live under the same roof with his grandmother, even had he made that his own wish; and he did in some measure incline towards French family ways and customs.

After dinner there was a rendezvous in the balcony, which prefaced a stroll on the terrace, lengthening into the moonlight. The lovers went their own way; Mrs Hutton met with an old acquaintance; Mr Melhuish and his churchwarden walked into the town. Mr Durant took pity on his companion of the morning, who felt rather shunted by the appearance of Mr Frank Jarvis upon the scene. That terrace-

walk at Rockbro' in the summer moonlight is one of the finest in England. They went to the end of it, where the country broke away into a vast mystery of moorland, indistinct and dim as the great wide sea. They walked in silence, as if they were people who had known each other a long while, and were dispensed from playing at polite observances. Others were there before them, and amongst those others Miss Denham who advanced a quick step or two, and then checked herself with the reflection that Winny seemed quite contented in her present company, and might not care for any addition to it.

The iron benches placed along the cliff for the convenience of loungers were occupied for the most part, and Durant invited Miss Hesketh to take a seat on a stone big enough for two. Winny accepted the invitation, and when Durant mechanically took out his cigar-case, and toyed with a cigar unlighted, to be as kind to him as he was to her, she was good enough to say that she had no invincible objection to smoke.

'Have you not? are you sure?—or is it your civility?' said he with eagerness, and being convinced that she spoke honest truth, he enjoyed his evening weed in perfect comfort.

There was not a breath of wind, and not a cloud in the sky. The rustle of the waves breaking far below on the shingly beach, reached the ear in a soft, multitudinous murmur. Distinct, but flat as a tintless shadow against the sky, ran the outline of the Castle on the huge north cliff, and in the hollow of the arc formed by the bay rose circle above circle the lights of the town, from the harbour where lay the crowded masts of the fishing-fleet and the sea-going ships, to the topmost ridge of the cliffs, of which the Crown Terrace formed the southern extremity. At intervals there was a strain of music from some open window, a light, bright touch on the piano, playing an air from 'Faust,' made into a waltz. It was near and distinct enough to influence Winny's quiet thoughts, and the silence, when it ceased, felt almost oppressive.

Durant's cigar was out then; he stood up,

and she with him. They loitered slowly towards the hotel, and Miss Denham who had waited for their going, kept them in sight until they disappeared under the portico of the Crown. Her escort was a small brother, and by him she sent her card to the young lady going upstairs. Winny Hesketh was still in view. Durant had bidden her good-night, and turned off to the billiard-room. She ran back to greet her friend. It was too late to come in, Georgie said, but she should be on the sands in the morning from ten to twelve, at home all the afternoon (her address was on the card), and at the subscription ball the next night, if Winny had the chance of giving her a meeting. Winny promised that she would if she could, explaining how and with whom she was at Rockbro', and then they separated.

Winny adjourned straight to the room that she was to share with Mildred. About ten minutes later Mildred and young Mrs Hutton came up in excellent spirits and agreement, and after a little desultory chat the girls were left to themselves. Mildred kissed Winny, and

hoped that she had not been neglected; but her thoughts were evidently all with herself and her beloved Frank. She had found her rest, and Winny's vocation towards her was gone.

Fortune favoured the visitors to Rockbro' in the next day's weather. It was a most splendid morning, and when the girls went to breakfast most of the arrangements for spending it agreeably were made. Mr Hutton and Mr Melhuish were going to church, of course—that was what they were at Rockbro' for—to hear the archdeacon's visitation charge; but Mrs Hutton and Mildred were devoted to a ride out to Hurley-Bridge, and Mr Frank Jarvis was to ride with them, taking Mr Hutton's horse.

'And what is Miss Winifred to do?' inquired Mrs Hutton.

'Oh, don't let anybody be troubled for me; I can always provide amusement for myself,' said Winny with her air of cheerful independence.

'Indeed, ma'am; so I have understood before. Will you be pleased to state what are

your views for the present occasion?' said Mr Hutton with mock solemnity, and Mr Durant smiled with a glance her way—she amused these gentlemen.

Winny did not care for being made a little fun of: 'I am so used to taking care of other people that I want nobody to take care of me,' was her rejoinder.

'Precisely so. Who might other people be?'

'Children. Girls. But seriously'—for she had become aware of Durant's quizzical regard —'I want to go into the Old Town, and potter about. I shall find my way to the harbour, and then up amongst the fishermen's houses to St Mary's Church on the north cliff, and perhaps to the Castle. When I am tired of that, about two o'clock, I shall come down into the town by the new road, and pay a visit to Miss Denham in St Andrew's Place. Towards four I shall be found here again, quite safe and sound, I trust.'

'I trust so too. It is delightful to learn how easily we can all be dispensed with, Durant,

isn't it? You had better go to church with Melhuish and me, Miss Winifred. You can stay outside, and meditate amongst the tombs, if you prefer that to prayers and sermon.'

'Thank you, but I'd rather not. You know what I mean. I cannot ride, more's the pity, but if I keep nobody else from riding, I shall be as happy as the day is long. I have borrowed a guide-book, and I know what I am going to do.'

Mr Hutton said no more, no one said any more, but when Winny appeared, very neat and unnoticeable in her brown bonnet and fawn carmelite dress, she found Mr Durant waiting for her; a fact which he intimated by producing a pair of new gloves, and stating that he was at her service.

'O Mr Durant, you are not going to dance attendance on me all day, surely?' she exclaimed with deprecating impatience. 'It will be so dull for you.'

'I rather like dulness,' was his reply in a sufficiently buoyant voice. 'And I promise not to interfere with your enjoyment of it.'

Winny professed to have forgotten something that she must have, and went back upstairs to present a remonstrance to Mildred who was dressing for her ride. Mildred had very much the absorbed air of not wishing to be teased about anything so trivial, and said with the utmost indifference: 'Durant has nothing else to do; you need not be so considerate for him, Winny. He is the most easy-tempered, useful fellow in the world. He would not ride to Hurley-Bridge even if he did not walk with you—he does not admire the paces of Melhuish's nag—he said so. And besides, my brother would not let you go wandering over Rockbro' all day by yourself. Is it likely? Go in peace.'

Winny hung about for some minutes hesitating and dissatisfied, but Mildred had no further thought for her; and finally she went away, and rejoined Mr Durant. Her pulses were slightly accelerated, her heart felt uneasy, her eyes, her upper lip, her whole countenance were expressive of proud, shy annoyance. The propriety of the arrangement was not in her thoughts,

her notions of propriety were of the broadest, simplest character, but she was vexed at being imposed as a charge on Mr Durant, who must think it such a dreadful bore. In the course of going up and downstairs she had changed her plan of proceedings, and as they issued from the portico of the Crown, she said with her firm, little invincible manner: 'You shall take me to the Castle and home again, if you will, Mr Durant. Do you know the way?'

'Yes, I know the way. We will go down to the shore.'

Winny knew this was the beginning of her own original programme—down to the shore could not be the way to the Castle which guarded the town and the bay from the topmost headland of the north cliffs. However, she let herself be guided, and they struck into the terrace-gardens which clothed the steep inclines of the descent with fragrant shade. A long flight of steps brought them to the Spa, where the fashionable folk crowded of an afternoon to the promenade-concerts; and another flight carried them down to the rocks and the

sands, all in a bustle at this time of day with bathers, and children digging, and invalidish people being drawn about in chairs, to inhale the salt freshness of the inflowing tide. It was a vigorous tide this morning, flowing before the wind, and with a brilliant sun upon it. The animation of the air swept Winny's distress fast away. Durant seemed cheerful, and not bored at all; and being come to herself, she judiciously reflected that since he was actually encumbered with her for some hours, it might be her duty to lighten their tedium, and let them be as pleasant as the circumstances allowed.

'This is very delightful,' he said, standing still, and turning his face to the wind. 'Rockbro' is the finest sea-side town in the kingdom; I never come to it but the old charm revives. Look at those boats with their sails set, in the shadow of the Castle rocks, Miss Hesketh, and then carry your eye round the magnificent sweep of the bay. I cannot appreciate the meaning of that scriptural assurance of a better state when there shall be no more sea. I remember when we came to Rockbro' every year, my brothers

and I, to visit our mother's mother. There were not such shoals of fine people in those days, nor any of the fine houses that they lodge in. Crown Terrace was a bare cliff, and all beyond it was wild moor. The grange and barren little fields at the edge of the heath where we lived are gone, built over—and gone too are those who lived there, except myself.'

They were back at the old personal reminiscences. Winny could only hear Durant with sympathy, and move on when he moved on. By and by, at the descent from the town to the sands, they met Miss Denham and her sisters on their way to bathe. Georgie did not seek to detain Winny, whose calm, complacent air she observed—Winny said she meant to visit her friend in the afternoon—but she took a note of Durant, quiet and critical, and when they had gone on she looked after them for a minute, laughing inwardly at some recollection she had of Winny's notions. Georgie could always see when Winny was happy, and she had a merry sense of discovery in what Winny's sunshine face reflected this morning.

Durant proved an excellent cicerone. He was at home amongst the fisher-folk in the harbour, and Winny being amused by their quaint talk and stories, they spent more time about there than they were aware of. Then came the steep streets of the Old Town to climb, so steep and so narrow some, that from the windows of the upper-stories overhanging those below, the inhabitants could shake hands across. House doors stood open revealing thrifty clean interiors, kitchen floors of red brick, white hearth-stones, dressers splendid with glowing stone-ware, walls illustrated with pictures of ships and sea-fights, and rough views of far-away, foreign places, brought home by sailor sons. Bird-cages were numerous hanging at window-sill and door-jamb, and so were bushy green flowering plants, fuschias and scarlet geraniums mostly. They emerged from the populous, stony labyrinth by a flight of steps and through a lych-gate into the churchyard of St Mary's. By that way came the dead to be buried—what generations of them! It was a crowded place; there were assembled the

Rockbro' majority. A low wall surrounded it, and looking over, beyond the roofs and chimney-pots, the bay stretched to the horizon, blue, serene. At that instant the organ in the church poured out a flood of music.

'It is at St Mary's that the archdeacon holds his visitation — the service must be over,' said Durant, and he consulted his watch.

It was over. That music was the dismissal, and the two idlers left the churchyard rather precipitately, not to be entangled in the leaving congregation. They turned up the road to the Castle, and on the way Durant bought a regale of buns and fruit for his companion, who ate it with girlish satisfaction, resting on a green mound within the ancient fortress. After that they perambulated its ruins and precincts, and then took their way down into the Now Tewn.

'It will be half-past three o'clock before I can land you in St Andrew's Place, Miss Hesketh —will an hour be enough for your visit to your friend?' Durant inquired as they were going.

'Yes. But, pray, don't let me tie you any longer,' said Winny in good earnest. 'The road to the Crown cannot be very hard to find, and perhaps Miss Denham will set me part of the way.'

'I am responsible to Hutton for your safe production at the hotel before six, and I decline to remit my duty to another.'

Winny Hesketh was not accustomed to contradict men. When Mrs Broome wanted to put a check on her tutorial zeal, she quoted Mr Broome: Mr Broome said so-and-so—such was Mr Broome's wish: and Winny was abjectly submissive. Thus she was now to Durant who spoke with a certain genial imperiousness. The walk through the fine streets was very entertaining; there were many objects to admire in the shop-windows, and it was quite half-past three when the door of Miss Denham's temporary lodging was reached. As the servant opened it Durant kindly, encouragingly, offered to shake hands with his meek charge, and said in a voice meant to put her at ease: 'I am going to the Club—at five, sharp, I shall call

for you. Now, remember;' and as Winny thanked him with a pretty simplicity, he lifted his hat, and marched swiftly off in the direction from which they had come.

Georgie received her friend with a mischievous chuckle. 'I saw you coming. Let me look at you,' cried she, and twisted Winny round to the light.

Winny sustained her scrutiny without flinching. 'Well?' said she interrogatively, when it was over. Georgie continued to peer and to chuckle. 'I don't know what you mean,' Winny stated. 'I am very well, thank you, and I have been enjoying myself this morning.'

'No need to announce that. You have a tell-tale face. You'll never be able to keep your secrets, Winny.'

'I am warned—I'll have none. You have a lively view from this window, Georgie. You see the Bridge.'

Georgie perceived that Winny either did not understand her raillery, or else did not like it, and would not respond. She had both tact and kindness, and she veered away from the

personal question to general and literary gossip such as they were more used to indulge. They told what books they had read lately, what progress Georgie was making in the occult sciences, and to what lengths Winny was proceeding with her pen. Georgie had no great esteem for Winny's rhymes and prose stories, but there must be give and take in friendship; and when Winny had listened with attentive aspect to obscure and difficult psychological speculations, it was no more than fair that Georgie should lend half an ear to her account of sketches from nature on the outside—especially when Winny had it to boast that one of these sketches had been up to London, and had come back tied round with pink tape, and accompanied by a letter from a real publisher, very encouraging, as Georgie did not deny.

This letter (Winny had received it, forwarded from Cotham that morning) was pondered over by the two girls with much seriousness. The writer supposed himself to be addressing a very young lady and of limited experience. He

advised her to study life and grow older, preserving her simplicity and vigour of diction, and held out a hope that she would succeed in later efforts, though he qualified her present work as crude, and wanting in knowledge of the world.

'I daresay you have made some queer blunder, Winny; you should consult me when you want to appear a little learned in law, physic, and divinity,' said Georgie with that superior wisdom to which Winny bowed. 'Have you afflicted your heroine with some inscrutable malady? there's a fever heroines are apt to take, I don't quite know what fever —and consumption comes in convenient often. Perhaps if you knew a little more, you would say a little less. When I write a tale my heroine shall be a healthy young woman—or else a raging lunatic. This gentleman gives you good advice—you cannot do better than follow it—and recollect, I'll help you when you are in a difficulty. There are some amazing streaks of ignorance in you, Winny, and imagination does not clear up positive ignorance. Nor will reading books do it. There

are few things to be really learned except by commerce with the world.'

Winny sighed, discouraged: 'And my world is a schoolroom,' said she.

The friends were sitting in the window with the lively prospect, Winny's look-out being towards the town and Georgie's towards the sea and the Bridge.

They went on discoursing of literary ventures until Georgie paused in the midst of a paragraph of wise counsel to study a sudden, beautiful light that had come into Winny's face. Winny heard that her voice had ceased. 'Go on—what were you saying?' she asked, but without turning her eyes from the distance in the street.

'Oh, nothing—Is Mr Durant coming? It must be close upon five,' said Georgie quietly.

'Yes'—and Winny began to tie her bonnet-strings, and draw on her gloves. 'Here he is.'

Georgie leant forward to see him, and as she drew back Winny met her eyes, dropt her own and blushed. But Georgie was become all at once blind and blank, and ran on with some

new remarks: 'I have a few flowers for you, Winny—they sent us a box from home this morning—flowers for the ball. I wish you were to be there—you have never been to a ball. How you would enjoy it!'

'We brought dresses, Mildred and I, on the chance, but I have not heard a word about going. Everybody will be tired. There's the bell.'

'Yes. There's the bell.' Georgie attended her friend down stairs to the door, carrying her gift of flowers.

'Ready?' said Durant as Winny appeared; and his brown face and bright eyes shone with manly indulgence. It is probable that he had divined by some means the sort of shy, unconfessed pleasure Miss Hesketh felt in his company.

Winny only answered, 'Yes,' but she went out forgetting to bid Georgie good-bye.

'Stop, Winny, you are leaving your flowers—won't you have them?' cried her friend.

'Oh yes, thank you, thank you,' and Winny turned, deeply ashamed, to receive her nosegay.

Georgie went upstairs three steps at a time to the window with the lively prospect; and there she stood, softly whistling, and very meditative, indeed, watching the figures of Mr Durant and Winny Hesketh threading their way through the crowd on the Bridge until they were no longer in sight. Then she walked up and down the room with her hands behind her, and lost in thought—finally she halted at the window again, and said aloud: 'Winny is in for it—Poor little thing! I wonder how it will end.' And Georgie did not feel quite so sure that she was amused as she had done a couple of hours ago. For Georgie had very considerable insight, and she rather distrusted the maxims on which Winny had been brought up, concerning the other sex. She was afraid they would not wear.

CHAPTER XIX.

AT A ROCKBRO' BALL.

MR DURANT and Winny Hesketh were accused of being late in returning to the hotel, but it was only a few minutes past six. Mrs Hutton and Mildred were busy upstairs.

'Here you are at last, Winny! I suppose you could not tear yourself away from Miss Denham,' cried Mildred, who always had a little jealousy of that rival friendship. 'We are to go to the ball. I have shaken out your dress for you. Now, are you happy?'

Winny's countenance answered for her that she was very happy. 'All of us?' said she.

'Yes; unless Durant prefer to keep Melhuish company—Melhuish will not go. My brother enjoys a dance as well as ever he did, and you, too, Fanny.'

'It was not much dancing I had before I

was married, Milly,' said her sister. 'But we must press Durant into our service, or what shall we do for partners? The subscription-balls at Rockbro' are capable of being immense disappointments to girls who don't carry partners with them. If Mr Durant does not go, we shall be 'three to two in our party—counting your precious Frank one of us.'

At dinner Mr Durant thought he would rather not go to the ball—a cigar on the moor with Melhuish would be more in his way. Upon which Mr Hutton said: 'Then I am afraid you will not get much dancing, Miss Winifred—however, I'll do my utmost—I'll dance with my wife and you turn and turn about, if nobody better offers.'

Durant made no sign of rescinding his resolution, and Winny, having thanked Mr Hutton for his kind overtures, became intent upon her plate. Perhaps the prospect of the ball was a little less enchanting. Some one remarked that the Assembly Rooms were not far from the Crown, that it was a splendid light evening, and the gentlemen might walk there

—which they did; and Mrs Hutton and the girls had a carriage to themselves. On the road they reflected that they might have walked too—all the Jarvis family were walking, even the French gran'ma; it would have been pleasant, and would have spared them the tedious waiting *en queue*, which Mildred's impatience finally abridged when Frank had stood ten minutes at their carriage-door.

These Rockbro' subscription-balls took place once a fortnight, from the beginning of the season in May to the end of it in October. They were well supported, for the rooms were spacious and airy, and the floor was excellent for dancing. A *galop* was in progress when the Hutton party arrived, and as the couples whirled about, Winny Hesketh recognised presently her old school-fellow, Miss Cradock, labouring toilsomely in the clutch of a heavy dragoon; and a minute or two after, Miss Denham improving the occasion with a small brother. Georgie had much learning and philosophy, but she was passionately fond of dancing.

Mr Hutton was engaged first to his wife, of course, and Mildred had a constant partner secured in her precious Frank. Winny subsided quietly on a red bench under the wing of the French gran'ma, who professed a partiality for the unobtrusive girl. She cast her keen fastidious eyes over Winny's pretty figure, and then said with the approving nod of patronage: 'I admire a simple toilette; your toilette is charming, Miss Winifred.' It was nothing but a muslin trimmed with her mother's lace, and Winny thought, ungratefully, that gran'ma complimented her for malice, because, just at that moment, Mildred, on Frank's arm, passed them to take her place in the quadrille, and Mildred's toilette was elegantly elaborate—crape embroidered in silver, and a coronet of silver leaves.

For the first half hour Winny's enjoyment of the ball was moderate. She had no partner yet. The Lancers struck up, and she feared she was going to sit out again, when Mr Jarvis the elder said: 'Shall I take compassion on you, Miss Winifred?'

'Yes, my dear, go—there is not a finer dancer in the room than my son,' urged the gran'ma. Winny went with such visible, grateful joy that she conferred on her partner the salutary sensation of doing a good action.

'There is my father dancing with Miss Winifred—I don't know which is the gayer,' Frank told his lady-love.

Mildred glanced through the maze, and laughed. 'Winny is quite undeveloped in the way of pleasure, but she takes to it kindly. I have always suspected in her a great capacity' in spite of her ascetic theories.'

Miss Denham was making similar reflections while she gazed hither and thither in search of Mr Durant. She did not discover him, but he had, in fact, repented himself, and just come in. During the dance Miss Cradock also espied Miss Winifred, and gave her a series of signals in the distance; and when Winny was restored to her seat on the red bench, she found her out, and claimed acquaintance with boisterous familiarity.

'You are the last person I should have ex-

pected to see in a Rockbro' ball-room, Miss Winifred! you ought to despise and contemn our frivolous amusements. How will you settle again in your dull schoolroom after such frantic dissipation?'

Winny was affronted by this rude raillery—certainly the possession of money gives some people extraordinary confidence. She vouchsafed no reply but what could be conveyed by silence. Georgie arrived—not to her succour. Georgie rallied her too on the vanishing of her grave airs. 'If you were my governess, I should discard you on the spot,' said she.

Winny blushed; she was hurt, surprised. She cast an appealing, deprecating look at her friend, and said: 'It would, perhaps, have been wiser to keep away. It is my first, and most likely it will be my last, taste of such frantic dissipation.'

The dragoon dashed in to bear off Miss Cradock for a waltz—she was his prize, the captive of his sword and spurs—she and her great fortune. Georgie made a sign of summons to her useful little brother, and Winny was once more

left in peace with the French gran'ma. The music of that waltz was magical. All at once she became aware of Durant approaching. Her blush had not faded, nor had the plaintive expression gone out of her eyes when, to his inquiry whether she would like to join in this waltz, she answered that she thought she would rather not.

'Oh, I am sure you would—come,' said Durant persuasively, and taking her hand as she rose, he drew it through his arm, patted it to re-assure her, for it was plain to see that she had been somehow disconcerted, and steered leisurely off to the top of the room. Mildred observed that she was glad Durant had changed his mind, and come —Winny would get her share of dancing now.

She did get it. Miss Denham counted that she danced every dance to the end, and only twice with anybody but Mr Durant. It caused her to reflect—but then she knew the exigencies of the Rockbro' balls, and the general and permitted preference of visitors for the partners they brought with them. In such a society undesirable acquaintances were to be avoided,

and suspected. Georgie herself had no partner that evening except her brother, and him it was her duty to share with a younger sister.

There was one lady present who made a sensation, and had a large surrounding. She arrived late, and the French gran'ma called her by some foreign title, but Winny Hesketh knew her at a glance for Miss Nina Mostyn, the beauty of her day at the old Manor School. She was remarkably attired in a vaporous, flame-coloured dress with trimmings of black and scarlet, and twinkled with diamonds wherever a jewel could be set. Her husband and escort was a very big, stout, dark gentleman, many years older than herself, the Count Saldanha. She had no sooner entered the room than the finest company hovered to meet her, eager for a bow, a word, or any item of notice that she might condescend to grant them. She was the fashion at Rockbro' that season, the most beautiful, most conspicuous lady there. It was an envied distinction to know her, and she queened it with an imperious coquetry amidst her court of admirers.

Miss Denham had taken measures to renew

her intimacy with her early favourite, who, thus transfigured, had for her inquisitive mind the fascination of a curious study. Georgie told Winny Hesketh, as they sat for a few minutes watching their former companion, that she was leading a life of the wildest excitement and extravagance, which it was not possible, with her frame, she could hold out long. Winny contemplated her as a being of another sphere from that in which her own lot was cast, and asked no question except whether her husband was a Jew. Georgie did not know what he was, except that his wealth appeared unbounded; and unless for that, it was a wonder to the world why this exquisite woman had married him.

'She must have been mad, people say—perhaps there is more truth in that than they mean. She looks like a creature possessed at this moment. She plays with mesmerism and spirit-rapping—you cannot imagine how she interests me, Winny. I wish she would speak to me that you might see her nearer—see her marvellous eyes.'

'She looks awfully proud,' said Winny.

'She is awfully proud.—And to what weird fate her pride, fulness of bread and abundance of idleness may bring her'—— Georgie stopt short, arrested by a hard stare from the French gran'ma. 'You'll have none of those temptations, Winny, nor those excuses,' she whispered with a sort of defiant confusion, returning the fixed gaze of the old lady's black eyes.

Winny looked up at her friend, not quite understanding, and said: 'No,' and at that instant Durant claimed her for another dance.

When that dance was over the room began to thin rapidly. There were already gleams of morning in the east. But Mildred would have one dance more, and after that one more still, until the band gave tokens of breaking up, and it was daylight in the streets. The Hutton party walked back to the Crown. It was four o'clock when they were admitted—the last of the ball-going guests to return. They had coffee, and then the girls went to their room, but agreed that it was useless to go to bed. They sat by their open window and talked, watching the sunrise upon the water.

'Oh, it is happy to think that Frank and I can be parted no more!' cried Mildred softly. It was the first voluntary, confidential reference she had made yet to the clearing of her prospects.

Winny said: 'It was a beautiful ball, Mildred —we shall never have such another.'

'Never!' Mildred echoed. 'Next year at this time Frank and I will be sober married people. I wish you would find some one to love, Winny, and follow our example.'

Winny gave herself a comfortable stretch in her easy-chair, and said: 'It appears to be an absorbing and enviable state of being,' and then she laughed at some merry idea in her own mind.

'You little mocker, I will not talk to you!' cried Mildred indignantly. But she did nevertheless.

Mr Hutton had given the girls notice that they must be ready to start on their homeward journey at ten o'clock, and after a rest, they packed up their finery, and as soon as the house

was astir, went out, and away to the shore for a refreshing dip in the sea. At breakfast Mr Jarvis the elder who had seen them go and come, remarked that Miss Winifred's eyes were brighter than ever, and that it was good to be young. But Mildred betrayed a languor, and the French gran'ma had the visage of a hundred years.

Mr Durant did not present himself until the hour of starting. He could sleep, timely or untimely, and had enjoyed his five hours' lawful rest, so that the day before him was as welcome and no more tedious than other days. He drove Miss Hesketh back to Foston in the phaeton as they had come, and landed her at the house *sans* misadventure, having narrated to her on the road home those wold-country stories that had been left untold for other conversation on the road out to Rockbro'.

END OF VOL. I.



